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THESIS

NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVES AND THE NEOREALIST STATE: IRAN AND REALPOLITIK

by

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December 2000

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This thesis argues that pragmatic, neorealist interests—reducing Iran's international isolation, opening avenues for economic cooperation and commercial exchange, restoring religious and cultural links, and safeguarding the mutually advantageous relationships with influential powers in the region—are the true foundations of Iranian national security and foreign policy decisionmaking. Iran's imperative has been—and still *is*—focused on the pragmatic national security interests of the nation-state model vice the ideological potential for spreading its brand of Islamic revolution abroad. The causes of these Islamic revolutionary groups, no matter how noble in the Iranian leaderships' eye, do not outweigh the more classic nation-state decisionmaking process that the Iranian government undergoes when it determines the best course of action on an issue of foreign policy and/or national security—or *realpolitik*. It is the neorealist approach which always wins out in national security matters of a state. Presented are four case studies of Iranian relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and four Persian Gulf States (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia). What each reveals is an Islamic Iran whose policy decisions and actions compelled by the rational, state model of neorealism and not ideology.

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NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVES AND THE NEOREALIST STATE: IRAN AND REALPOLITIK

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degrees of

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and
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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that pragmatic, neorealist interests—reducing Iran's international isolation, opening avenues for economic cooperation and commercial exchange, restoring religious and cultural links, and safeguarding the mutually advantageous relationships with influential powers in the region—are the true foundations of Iranian national security and foreign policy decisionmaking. Iran's imperative has been—and still *is*—focused on the pragmatic national security interests of the nation-state model vice the ideological potential for spreading its brand of Islamic revolution abroad. The causes of these Islamic revolutionary groups, no matter how noble in the Iranian leaderships' eye, do not outweigh the more classic nation-state decisionmaking process that the Iranian government undergoes when it determines the best course of action on an issue of foreign policy and/or national security—or *realpolitik*. It is the neorealist approach which always wins out in national security matters of a state. Presented are four case studies of Iranian relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and four Persian Gulf States (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia). What each reveals is an Islamic Iran whose policy decisions and actions compelled by the rational, state model of neorealism and not ideology.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The break-up of the Soviet Union confronted Iran with a set of challenges and opportunities. On the one hand the long-standing threat presented by the USSR receded and the door opened for much closer contact with Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, now divided among eight independent states, six of them with at least nominally Muslim majority populations. On the other hand, Iran's security was threatened by both a United States no longer balanced by a Soviet superpower and the volatility and instability of the new states created in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. How should this sudden and unforeseen situation be handled? Should the Islamic Republic of Iran exploit the weakness of the new states to export radical Islamic ideology and stamp its authority as a major regional power, or should it follow a more neighborly and cooperative path?

In this paper it is argued that pragmatic, neorealist interests—reducing Iran's international isolation, opening avenues for economic cooperation and commercial exchange, restoring religious and cultural links, and safeguarding the mutually advantageous relationships with influential powers in the region—are the true foundations of Iranian national security and foreign policy decisionmaking. Important to US policy makers and analysts is understanding the basis for Iranian decisionmaking. Several experts still cling to the 1980s and 1990s notion that Iran's decisionmaking stems from its naïve early policy of exporting the Islamic revolution throughout the Middle East. But, is this the true basis of today's Iranian decionmaking regarding national security policies? Was it really the basis for decisionmaking in the 1980s and 1990s? Does Iran make its foreign policy decisions based upon the expansion of Khomeini's brand of revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism abroad or does it make its decisions based upon national security interests of the state? In short, my answer is "no." If we penetrate this veneer, we find evidence of a far more pragmatic Iran. Although the Iranians certainly allowed emotion to reign during the honeymoon years of the 1979 revolution, this euphoria quickly disappeared with the onslaught of the war with Iraq and Iran's international isolation due to its overt support of terrorism and irredentist groups among its Arab neighbors.

Iran's imperative has been—and I contend still *is*—focused upon those national security interests of the nation-state model vice the ideological potential for spreading its brand of Islamic revolution abroad. No matter how noble in the Iranian leaderships eyes it cannot outweigh the more classic nation-state decisionmaking process that the Iranian government undergoes in deciding the best course of action on an issue of foreign policy and/or national security. It all comes down to what Germany's Otto von Bismarck called *realpolitik*. I submit that these forces are always in interplay with one another within a state. But it is the realpolitik—or *neorealist*—approach which always wins out in national security matters of a state. This includes Iran.

Presented are four case studies of Iranian relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and some of the Persian Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia. What each reveals is an Islamic Iran whose policy decisions and actions compelled by the rational state model of neorealism and not ideology.

The first of these case studies deals with Iran-Azerbaijan relations. When presented with a decision to support one over the other, Iran considers the issues of territorial integrity and state survival more important than the Islamic revolutionary objectives of regional fundamentalist groups. During the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict of the early 1990s, Iran lent both financial and physical support to the Christian factions over the Islamic fundamentalist Shi'ïte factions in Azerbaijan. Tehran's actions here mirrored similar policies taken in regard to Islamic fundamentalist factions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This occurs because the Iranian government perceives the rise to power of zealous, unpredictable Islamist powers along its own borders—outside of Tehran's control—as a danger to its national security.

The second case study on Iranian-Turkish relations likewise illustrates Tehran's neorealist core in policymaking. Turkey, as a Muslim and secular nation, should have been an anathema to the new Islamic state created by Khomeini but was not. Due to the survival need of the new regime during the Iran-Iraq War, Khomeini and his

revolutionary followers sought to keep Turkey, if not as an ally then at least as a neutral state, during the war. In later years, Iran used its leverage with several ethnic groups (like the Kurds, Alevi, and Armenians) to balance against what it perceived as a potential security threat posed by Turkey in northern Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia. Tehran's actions here mirrored similar policies taken in regard to Islamic fundamentalist factions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, fears of Pan-Turanism are of significant concern to Tehran. The nation has suffered severe economic wounds due to U.S. economic sanctions and Washington's containment policy. In this respect, the aftermath of the 1979 revolution has not drastically changed the nation-state decision-making process of Iranian officials as many US experts think. Iran will continue to favor policies, which enhance the stability of nations on their borders and rid the region of the greatest potential perceived threat to Iran's sovereignty and national security—namely the United States.

The third case study involves relations between Iran and Israel. In this case, Tehran's rhetoric and actions appear both conflicting and paradoxical; however, the common thread running throughout is Iran's perception of threats to its territorial integrity and a strong desire to balance power against these threats through both conventional and unconventional means. Conventional means include military modernization, weapons procurement, and the forging of regional alliances to counter threats. Unconventional means include the support and influence of terrorist groups and investments in weapons of mass destruction. Iranian policy has consistently focused on balancing and countering against Israel; a country cast by Tehran as an extension of US hegemonic penetration of the Middle East.

The last case study examines relations between Iran and the Persian Gulf States: specifically the nations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that Iran's relations with the Arab Gulf countries operate on two tracks: on the one hand there is a decided need to cultivate friends, escape regional isolation, and continue important trade relations; on the other hand, Iran nurtures a desire to assert an independent and forceful foreign policy. However, Iran's leaders

have not balanced these divergent policies well. Indeed, relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors have been strained for decades, especially since the revolution. Between Arab support of Baghdad in the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian occupation of the disputed UAE islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs', and links of Iranian support of Shi'a uprisings in Bahrain, have all worked to create an apprehensive atmosphere.

Iran does have serious national security concerns throughout the region of the Persian Gulf. Tehran has sought, in recent years, to improve upon its relations with its Arab neighbors to alleviate tensions stemming from its perceived threats to the foundations of Iranian sovereignty and the Islamic revolution. In this regard, Iran's decisionmaking is anchored in neorealist behavior. True threats to the very fabric of the Iranian Islamic state are swiftly addressed through pragmatic, realpolitik. It is through this prism that Iran's policy dealings must be viewed. This same behavior is also evident when analyzing Tehran's dealings with Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Naturally, the process of improving relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors has not hindered Tehran's efforts to enhance its defense capability. This is Iran's pragmatism. Unlike Iraq, the Islamic Republic's attempt to modernize its armed forces has been under less scrutiny by the international community for most of the 1990s. All of these case studies have one common theme. They demonstrate that neorealism is the determinant of Iran's national security policy decisionmaking. When taken together these case studies demonstrate the key tenets of national security, territorial integrity, power balancing against regional and interregional hegemony, and domestic cohesiveness predicate Iranian national security policy.

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It is rare that a sole individual can accomplish any goal in life without some support either physical or emotional. I am no exception. Since my high school days, the society and culture of Iran have long been a fascination of mine. Before I ever arrived at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), I had a personal goal to research and write on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Work as an active duty Marine Officer has kept me quite busy over the last fifteen years and I wondered if I would ever find the time to fulfill this goal. This achievement would most certainly have been later vice sooner if it were not for the wisdom and foresight of the United States Marine Corps in investing the time, resources, and confidence in the Officers it selects to study regional security issues. Likewise, I acknowledge that my selection for this opportunity would likely have been missed if not for the recommendations and praise provided to the selection board in 1998 by my superiors in the Navy and Marine Corps intelligence activities. These include the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Lowell Jacoby, USN; Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, Mr. Paul Lowell; and Marine Corps Deputy Director of Intelligence, Mr. Michael H. Decker. I particularly appreciate Mr. Decker's kind words of confidence before my departure from the Pentagon. In addition, I want to thank my good friend Commander William Eldard, USN, who has rendered unrelenting encouragement and good humor in my application and subsequent tasks here at NPS.

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in her eyes. She is my best friend and I earnestly thank God for granting me her love and companionship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The break-up of the Soviet Union confronted Iran with a set of challenges and opportunities. On the one hand the long-standing threat presented by the USSR receded and the door opened for much closer contact with Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, now divided among eight independent states, six of them with at least nominally Muslim majority populations. . On the other hand, Iran's security was threatened by both a United States no longer balanced by a Soviet superpower and the volatility and instability of the new states created in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. How should this sudden and unforeseen situation be handled? Should the Islamic Republic of Iran exploit the weakness of the new states to export radical Islamic ideology and stamp its authority as a major regional power, or should it follow a more neighborly and cooperative path?

In this paper it is argued that pragmatic, neorealist interests—reducing Iran's international isolation, opening avenues for economic cooperation and commercial exchange, restoring religious and cultural links, and safeguarding the mutually advantageous relationships with influential powers in the region. Important to US policy makers and analysts is understanding the basis for Iranian decisionmaking. Several experts still cling to the 1980s-1990s notion that Iran's decisionmaking stems from its naïve early policy of exporting the Islamic revolution throughout the Middle East. [1] Nevertheless, is this the true basis of today's Iranian decisionmaking regarding national security policies? Was it really the basis for decisionmaking in the 1980s and 1990s? Does Iran make its foreign policy decisions based upon the expansion of Khomeini's brand of revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism abroad or does it make its decisions based upon national security interests of the state? In short, my answer is "no." Many believe that Iranian foreign policy initiatives following the 1979 Islamic revolution where indicative of an ideologically based international relations strategy and that neorealist

[1] Legro, Jeffrey W. and Moravcsik, Andrew. "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 5-55; Lebow, Richard Ned. "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, editors. *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Zagare, Frank C. "All Mortis, No Rigor," *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 107-114.

theory is the wrong approach to analysis.[2] However, if we penetrate this veneer we find evidence of a far more pragmatic nation. Although the Iranians certainly allowed emotion to reign during the honeymoon years of the 1979 revolution, this euphoria quickly disappeared with the onslaught of the war with Iraq and Iran's international isolation due to its overt support of terrorism and irredentist groups among its Arab neighbors.

Iran's imperative has been—and I contend still *is*—focused upon those national security interests of the nation-state model vice the ideological potential for spreading its brand of Islamic revolution abroad. The causes of these groups, matter how noble in the Iranian leaderships' eye, do not outweigh the more classic nation-state decisionmaking process that the Iranian government undergoes in deciding the best course of action in deciding on an issue of foreign policy and/or national security. It all comes down to what Germany's Otto von Bismarck called *realpolitik*. I submit that these forces are always in interplay with one another within a state. But it is the realpolitik—or *neorealist*—approach that always wins out in national security matters of a state. This includes Iran.

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A. IRAN AND AZERBAIJAN

The first of these case studies deals with Iran-Azerbaijan relations. As I will prove in this case study, when presented with a decision to support one over the other, Iran considers the issues of territorial integrity and state survival paramount to Islamic revolutionary objectives of regional fundamentalist groups. The details to follow show that during the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict of the early 1990s Iran lent both financial and physical support to the Christian factions over the Islamic fundamentalist Shi'ite

[2] Ibid.

factions in Azerbaijan. Tehran's actions here mirrored similar policies taken in regard to Islamic fundamentalist factions in Afghanistan and Iraq.[3] This occurs because the Iranian government perceives the rise to power of zealous, unpredictable Islamist powers along its own borders—outside of Tehran's control—as a danger to its national security. Therefore, it has been in Iran's national security interest to back factional groups *against* Islamists (s it did in Azerbaijan), despite the ideological paradox. In this respect, the aftermath of the 1979 revolution has not drastically changed the nation-state decision-making process of Iranian officials as many US experts think. Iran will continue to favor policies, which enhance the stability of nations on their borders and rid the region of the greatest potential perceived threat to Iran's sovereignty and national security—namely the United States.

B. IRAN AND TURKEY

Likewise, the case study on Iranian-Turkish relations demonstrates that when presented with a choice between ideological principles and territorial integrity, it was the issues of territorial integrity and state survival that were deemed by Tehran as paramount over the Islamic revolutionary objectives of regional fundamentalist groups by Iran.

Turkey, as a Muslim and secular nation, should have been an anathema to the new Islamic state created by Khomeini but it was not. The survival need of the new regime during the Iran-Iraq War prompted Khomeini and his revolutionary followers to keep Turkey, if not as an ally, then at least as a neutral during the war. In the 1990s, Iran used its leverage with several ethnic groups (i.e., the Kurds, Alevi, and Armenians) to offset its perception that Turkey posed a potential security in northern Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia. Tehran's actions here mirrored similar policies taken in regard to Islamic fundamentalist factions in Afghanistan and Iraq.[4] Moreover, fears of *Pan-Turanism* are of significant concern to Tehran. The nation suffered severe economic wounds due to U.S.

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[3] The Islamist fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan are made up mostly of Sunni Islamists vice Shi'ite Islamists in Iran.

[4] Fuller, Gramham E. *Islamic Fundamentalism in Afghanistan: Its Character and Prospects* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1991), 6.

economic sanctions and Washington's containment policy. In this respect, the aftermath of the 1979 revolution did not drastically change the nation-state decision-making process of Iranian officials as many US experts think. Iran will continue to favor policies, which enhance the stability of nations on their borders and rid the region of the greatest potential perceived threat to Iran's sovereignty and national security—namely the United States. Figure 1 depicts Iran and its surrounding neighbor states.

Figure 1. Map of Iran and Its Surrounding Neighbor States.[5]

C. IRAN AND ISRAEL

The Iran-Israel case study also supports the analysis of the neorealist foundation of Iranian policy decisions. Tehran's rhetoric and actions appear both conflicting and paradoxical; however, the common thread running throughout is Iran's perception of threats to its territorial integrity and a strong desire to balance power against these threats through both conventional and unconventional means. Conventional means include

[5] *Map of Iran* (1996) on the internet at http://icc.ucdavis.edu/areas/aes/laura/iran.htm. [Accessed 18 October 2000].

military modernization, weapons procurement, and the forging of regional alliances to counter threats. Unconventional means include the support and influence of terrorist groups and investments in weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Iranian policy has consistently focused on balancing and countering against Israel, seen by Tehran as a mere extension of US hegemonic penetration of the Middle East. In this respect, the aftermath of the 1979 revolution has not drastically changed the nation-state decision-making process of Iranian officials as many US experts think. Iran will continue to favor policies—no matter how paradoxical—which enhance the stability of nations on their borders and rid the region of the greatest potential perceived threat to Iran's sovereignty and national security—namely the United States.

D. IRAN AND THE PERSIAN GULF STATES

The final case study explored concerns Iranian relations with the Persian Gulf States of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The two major factors attracting US interests and concern about regional stability in the Middle East are its rich oil resources and its strategic geographical location. Although US forces remained deployed throughout the Gulf region because of Iraq's continued defiance, Washington has long subscribed to a policy by which long-term local security maintained by the Gulf States themselves. US policy once viewed Iran and Saudi Arabia fulfilling this role in Nixon's "Twin Pillars" doctrine.[6] Of course, this policy doctrine became moot in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the 444-day American hostage crisis in Tehran, and the decade-long demonizing rhetoric of the Khomeini theocratic regime.

Iran's relations with the Persian Gulf countries operate on two tracks: on the one hand there is a decided need to cultivate friends, escape regional isolation, and continue important trade relations; on the other hand, Iran nurtures a desire to assert an independent and forceful foreign policy. However, Iran's leaders have not balanced these divergent policies well. Indeed, relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors have been

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[6] Lenczowski, George. *American Presidents and the Middle East* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 116.

strained for decades, especially since the revolution. Indeed, relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors have been strained for decades, especially since the revolution. Fearful of Islamic revivalism, most Arab states supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War and paid huge sums of money to sustain Saddam Hussein's war effort.[7]

Over the last decade, the Persian Gulf states have grown increasingly apprehensive that Iran is determined to attain regional hegemony. Moreover, Iran's so-called "bullying tactics"[8] have obscured whatever conciliatory moves it may have been willing to make over control and sovereignty of the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. Iran's claim to the islands has generated widespread apprehension. What began as a dispute between Sharjah, Ras al-Khaima, and Iran has evolved and escalated to a dispute first with the UAE, then with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and now with the Arab League. The issue is one of principle, but there are also strong strategic overtones. If Iran were to gain undisputed sovereignty over the islands, it could extend its territorial waters into large areas that contain rich oil reserves. The UAE has proposed submitting the dispute to the International Court of Justice for resolution. To date, however, Iran has refused to accept this avenue of reconciliation. So long as the dispute remains unresolved, and Iran continues to occupy and reinforce Abu Musa, tensions between Iran and the GCC will continue.[9]

Iran finds itself virtually surrounded by states with which it has ideological, religious, ethnic, and territorial differences.[10] The military alignment with the US among many of these same countries further heightens Iran's perception of encirclement by

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[7] Kemp, Geoffrey. "The Impact of Iranian Foreign Policy on Regional Security: An External Perspective," *Foreign Policy in a Changing Region* (New York: Routledge), 130-131.

[8] "GCC Supports UAE Over Island Issue," *ArabicNews.com* (27 February 1999) on the Internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed 13 February 2000].

[9] Ibid., 130.

[10] Boyne, Sean. "Iran Beseiged By It's Own Sense of Threat," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 11, no. 6 (11 June 99), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 20 January 2000]; and Ghoreishi, Ahmad and Zahedi, Dariush. "Iran's Security Concerns in the Persian Gulf," *Naval War College Review*, vol. XLIX, no. 3, (Summer 1996), 73-93.

threats. Although early Iranian leaders saw the US as the great opponent of Iranian strategic aspirations under Khomeini, since the accession to power of the reform-minded President Khatami, anti-US rhetoric has been toned down considerably. Nevertheless, major differences remain with the US, often seen as a symbol of Western decadence by Islamic fundamentalists. There is also resentment in Iran at ongoing US efforts to disrupt the transfer of advanced military technology from Russia and China, and at Washington's attempts to exclude Iran from the benefits of Caspian Sea oil development. For its part, the US has regarded Iran as a pariah state and an exporter of terrorism, and has kept sanctions in place, although Washington's attitude to Tehran has softened following the election of Khatami.[11] Iranian suspicions of US intentions, however, will be strengthened by remarks such as those made last year by the commander of US Central Command in the Persian Gulf, Marine General Anthony Zinni, who suggested that Iran posed a greater threat than Iraq.[12] Moreover, the Taliban have also succeeded in ruffling relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In March, the Saudis gave de facto recognition to the Taliban regime by signing a protocol allowing only Taliban-certified Afghans to take part in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.[13] Ironically, this development came at a time when Iran was seeking to augment its influence in the Gulf by improving relations with the moderate, West-leaning states of

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[11] United States Congress. Senate Committee on Intelligence. *Current And Projected National Security Threats To The United States and Its Interests Abroad: Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence*. 104th Congress, 2nd session (Washington, D.C., 22 February 1996) on the internet at http://www.fas.org/irp/ congress/1996_hr/s960222d.htm [Accessed 24 November 2000]; and Sheehan, Michael A. Ambassador, Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and Southern Asian Affairs (Washington, D.C., 2 November 1999) on the internet at http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1999/991102_sheehan_ terrorism.html [Accessed 29 November 1999].

[12] Boyne, Lexis-Nexis. Ironically, during 1998 and into early 1999 there had been some signs of an improving relationship between the two neighbors, but a complicating factor has been the fact that each country has supported a proxy militia opposed to the other's government; Iran supports the Iraqi opposition militia, the Badr Corps, which remains an irritant to Baghdad. There is a feeling in Tehran that, while Iraq is still a major threat, Saddam Hussein's military capability at present is quite weak and senior Iranian officials reportedly see little prospect of Iraq resuming hostilities against them in the foreseeable future.

[13] Fuller, Graham E. *Islamic Fundamentalism in the Northern Tier Countries, An Integrative View* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1991); and Fuller *Islamic Fundamentalism in Afghanistan*.

the GCC[14]—despite the fact that the GCC states provide military facilities for US forces. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia—the dominant member of the GCC, the other members being the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain—and Iran continued to move towards establishing closer ties, and in May 1998 the Saudi defense minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz, visited Iran for talks focusing on regional stability.

In early 1999, Iran established diplomatic relations with Bahrain, which accused Iran in the recent past of supporting Shi'a dissidents within its own territory. Bahrain's new ambassador, Salman Abdulwahab Al Sabbagh, said of his country's relations with Iran: "I don't want to speak about the past, but I would like to say that I am optimistic about the future."[15] As for relations with other GCC states, Kuwait and Iran conduct joint coast guard patrols in the Northern Gulf region and Oman formed a joint military committee with Iran some years ago and has recently conducted joint naval exercises together in the Southern Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman.[16]

All of these case studies have one common theme. They demonstrate the accuracy of neorealist theory as the underlying determinant of a state's national security policy decisionmaking concerning the Islamic state of Iran. Taken together they demonstrate the key tenets of national security, territorial integrity, power balancing against regional and interregional hegemony, and domestic cohesiveness Iranian national security policy.

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[14] Blanche, Ed, "Gulf States Face Up To Changing Alignments," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (11 Mar 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 23 October 1999].

[15] Boyne, Lexis-Nexis.

[16] Corless, Josh, "Iran to Fortify Cross-Strait Relations," *Jane's Navy International*, vol. 108, no. 8 (1 October 1999), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 23 October 1999].

II. THE THEORY OF NEOREALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

International relations theorist, Kenneth Waltz wrote, "Balance of power theory claims to explain the results of states' actions, under given conditions, and those results may not be foreshadowed in any of the actors' motives or be contained as objectives in their policies."[17] His balance of power theory begins with assumptions about states: They are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. According to Waltz:

> States pursue many goals, which are often vaguely formulated and inconsistent. They fluctuate with the changing currents of domestic politics, are prey to the vagaries of a shifting cast of political leaders, and are influenced by the outcomes of bureaucratic struggles. But all of this has always been known, and it tells us nothing about the merits of balance-of-power theory...According to the theory, a balance of power tends to form whether some or all states consciously aim to establish and maintain a balance, or whether some or all states aim for universal domination.[18]

Many international relations theorists agree with Waltz's ideas.[19] Stephen M. Walt states, "Balance of power theory assumes that states are essentially rational actors whose primary goal is survival...(a)s a result, states strive to increase their relative power...(i)n the neorealist version of balance of power theory, the distribution of power is the primary explanatory variable."[20]

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[17] Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGrall-Hill, Inc., 1979), 118

[18] Ibid., 119.

[19] See Martin, Lisa L. "The Contributions of rational Choice: A Defense of Realism," *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 74-83; Oren, Nissan, editor. *Images and Reality in International Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Nye Jr., Joseph S. *Understanding Internationals Conflicts* (New York: Longman, 1997); and especially Milani, Mohsen M. "Iran's Gulf Policy: From Idealism and Confrontation to Pragmatism and Moderation," in Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, editor, *Iran and the Gulf—A Search for Stability* (The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996).

[20] Walt, Stephen M. *Revolution and War*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 341.

Even as long ago as the time of Thucydides, author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War,*[21] political realism (from which neorealism has evolved) contained three key assumptions: (1) states (or city-states) are the key units of action; (2) states seek power, either as an end in itself or as a means to other ends; and (3) they behave in ways that are, by and large, rational, and therefore comprehensible to outsiders in rational terms.[22] Therefore, states will devise policies that will protect their own society by amassing or maintaining sufficient power, alone or in coalitions, to maintain their essential security interests.

Political realism and neorealism, according to Robert Gilpin, "must be seen as a philosophical disposition and set of assumptions about the world rather than as in any strict sense a 'scientific' theory."[23] Furthermore, Gilpin writes that the proponents of realism share three assumptions regarding political life. The first assumption is the essentially conflicting nature of international affairs in which anarchy is the rule; order, justice, and morality are the exceptions.

> The (neo)realist need not believe that one must always forego the pursuit of these higher virtues, but (neo)realists do stress that in the world as it is, the final arbiter of things political is power. All moral schemes will come to naught if this basic reality is forgotten.[24]

The second assumption is that the essence of social reality is in the group. This is why the relationships between states are important. The building blocks and ultimate

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[21] Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War.* circa 400 B.C. translated by John H. Finely, Jr. (New York: Modern Library, 1951).

[22] Keohane, Robert O. "Neorealism and World Politics," in Keohane, Robert O. editor, *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 7.

[23] Gilpin, Robert G. "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," in Keohane, Robert O. editor, *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 304; and in Donnelly, Jack. *Realism and International Relations (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-3.

[24] Gilpin, 304.

units of social and political life are neither democratic liberal thought nor the class dynamics of Marxism but, rather, realism. This is true because human beings confront one another ultimately as members of groups not as isolated individuals.

> "Homo sapiens" is a tribal species, and loyalty to the tribe for most of us ranks above all loyalties other than that of the family. In the modern world, we have given the name "nation-state" to these competing tribes and the name "nationalism" to this form of loyalty. True, the name, size, and organization of the competing groups into which our species subdivides itself do alter over time— tribes, city-states, kingdoms, empires, and nation-states— due to economic, demographic, and technological changes.[25]

The third assumption characterizing realist/neorealist thinking is the primacy that in all political life is power and security.[26] This observation has deep roots. Thucydides noted that men are motivated by honor, greed, and above all, fear.[27]

Neorealism and realism, however, are not identical ideas. Waltz has observed that international politics is, and always has been, a realm of conflict between "states" whether they are empires, city-states, or nation-states. In this theory, Waltz recognizes the "continuity" of these interactions as seen in the historical record of mankind.

A. SIX ASSUMPTIONS OF NEOREALISM

John Hobson's book *The State and International Relations*, describes Waltz's theory on neorealism. The following list provides a breakdown of Hobson's explanation of the assumptions of neorealism:[28]

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[25] Ibid., 305.

[26] Ibid., 305; and Frankel, Benjamin. *Roots of Realism* (New York: Frank Cass, 1996), 7.

[27] Thucydides, 44.

[28] Hobson, John M. *The State and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

- ***The "Continuity" Assumption***. Because the anarchical states system is ontologically superior to the units and is an autonomous and self-constituting realm, international relations never changes but has always been a realm of necessity and violence. Accordingly, the neorealist method seeks to uncover the essential a-historical laws of motion of international relations.

- ***The "Positional" or "Relative Gains" Assumption***. Anarchy and power differentiation require states to place a premium on short-term "relative gains" over long-term "absolute cooperative gains."

- ***The Political "Sovereignty" Assumption.*** Autonomous nation-states are the central actors in international relations. The sovereign state is the highest form of political expression and will remain so despite economic interdependence or globalization.

- ***The Survival "Rationality" Assumption***. The sovereign state is a unitary actor that rationally pursues its national survival.

- ***The High Domestic Agential State Power Assumption (Billiard-Ball Model).*** The State has high domestic agential power. States are likened to "billiard balls" not simply because they conflict and "bounce off each other," but above all because their internal or domestic properties are irrelevant to state behavior and international relations.

- ***No International Agential State Power and the "A-Moral" Assumption***. Because the State has no agency to use it can neither shape international relations nor mitigate the logic of anarchy, compelling it to ignore international morality as a basis for action/policy. They must pursue the technical means to survive (i.e., adaptation) in a hostile external world of competing states.[29]

Donnelly agrees with Waltz and Hobson.[30] Each of these six assumptions in the motivation of states in their international relations dealings has a resonance when applied to state relations throughout history, especially in the 20th century. Figure 2 illustrates the relations a few major international relations theories with that of neorealism. In its simplest form, neorealism assumes that the centrality of the state entity as the highest political form.[31] This is couple with the notion that the autonomy of the state is also high.

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[29]Hobson, 18-19.

[30] Donnelly, 46-51.

[31] Frankel, Benjamin, editor. *Realism: Restatements and Renewal* (New York: Frank Cass, 1996), 15.

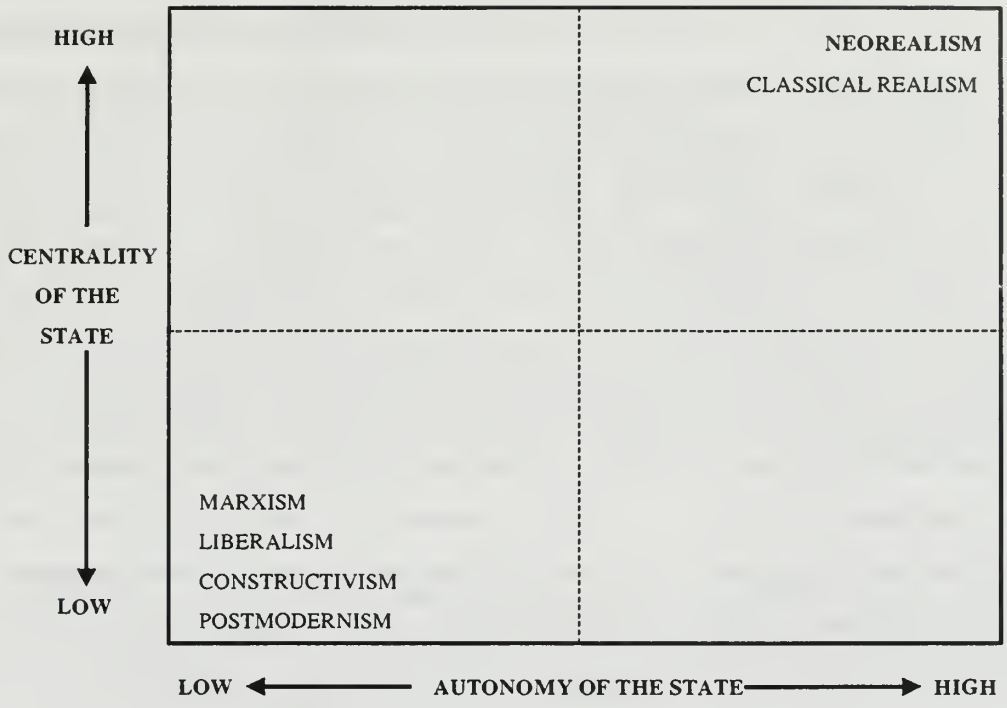

Figure 2. The Relationship of Neorealism to other State Theories[32]

In issues regarding regime survival, neither domestic politics, composition of the political elite, nor regime ideology makes a significant difference in predicting state behavior. Iran epitomizes this position. When confronted with annihilation by the Iraqis in the 1980s, Iran abandoned efforts to isolate itself from the international system and sought arms from its ideological enemies—the United States, the Soviet Union, and Israel. When necessary, Iran engaged in power balancing behavior by allying with Syria, a secular Arab-nationalist state, and Iran has made conciliatory gestures to its Gulf neighbors to balance against the superpowers in the Gulf.[33]

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[32] Hobson, 218.

[33] Kruse, James H. *Determinants of Iranian Foreign Policy: The Impact of Systemic, Domestic and Ideologic Factors* (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, 1994), 109.

To demonstrate the accuracy of neorealist theory in predicting state behavior, I will use four case studies analyzing the behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and the Persian Gulf states of the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. In each case, the analysis points to Tehran's quest to counter actual and potential imbalances within the international relations system portending negative outcomes regionally and domestically for Iran's policymaking. To clearly understand this rationale, I will briefly review Iran's security concerns and the foreign policy imperatives driving these concerns. By understanding these factors, one can better "see" the framework of the "world" from the Iranian perspective. This information, coupled with the analysis of the case studies, reveals an Iran which is not a zealous ideologue state bent upon exporting its revolution around the world at all costs, but rather Machiavellian and pragmatic in its foreign policy and national security decisions. In the end, Iran decision makers will form policies, which compliment the state's national security objectives of territorial integrity, economic prosperity, and survival.

III. THE IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE

A. IRAN'S SECURITY PERCEPTION

Iranian officials have come to view the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union with deep concern. Iran can no longer rely on the tried and tested strategy of a negative balance between Washington and Moscow.[34] With their rivalry over, Iran's strategic value diminished, ushering in a new, highly unpredictable era for the Islamic regime. Likewise, still recovering from the losses of the Iran-Iraq War and under the constriction US economic sanctions, Iran feels embattled and vulnerable to continued turmoil and chaos that have seemed to perpetually reign along its borders as depicted in Figure 3.

Since the late 1980s, Tehran has had to respond to systematic changes around it and has been compelled to function as much as possible within the new international system, which not only witnessed the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet superpower in the North, but also the emergence of the US as the undisputed extra-regional power in the Middle East.[35] Iranian concern with the country's territorial integrity also increased with the ethnic resurgences that have occurred in neighboring countries like Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Afghanistan since the breakup of the Soviet Union has brought some unrest to Iran's ethnic minorities. Fear that secessionist movements in Iran and on its borders could be used by outside powers to destabilize the country and the regime have struck a cord with Islamists and nationalists alike both in and out of the country. In the early 1990s, this fear extended to Iraq where the real potential for the formation of a Kurdish state drove Islamic Iran to make an ally of secular Turkey to ensure this did not happen.

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[34] Fawn, Rick and Larkins, Jeremy, editors. *International Society after the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 13.

[35] Mahdi, Akbar, "Islam, the Middle East, and the New World Order," in Hamid Zangeneh, editor, *Islam, Iran, and World Stability* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994), 198.

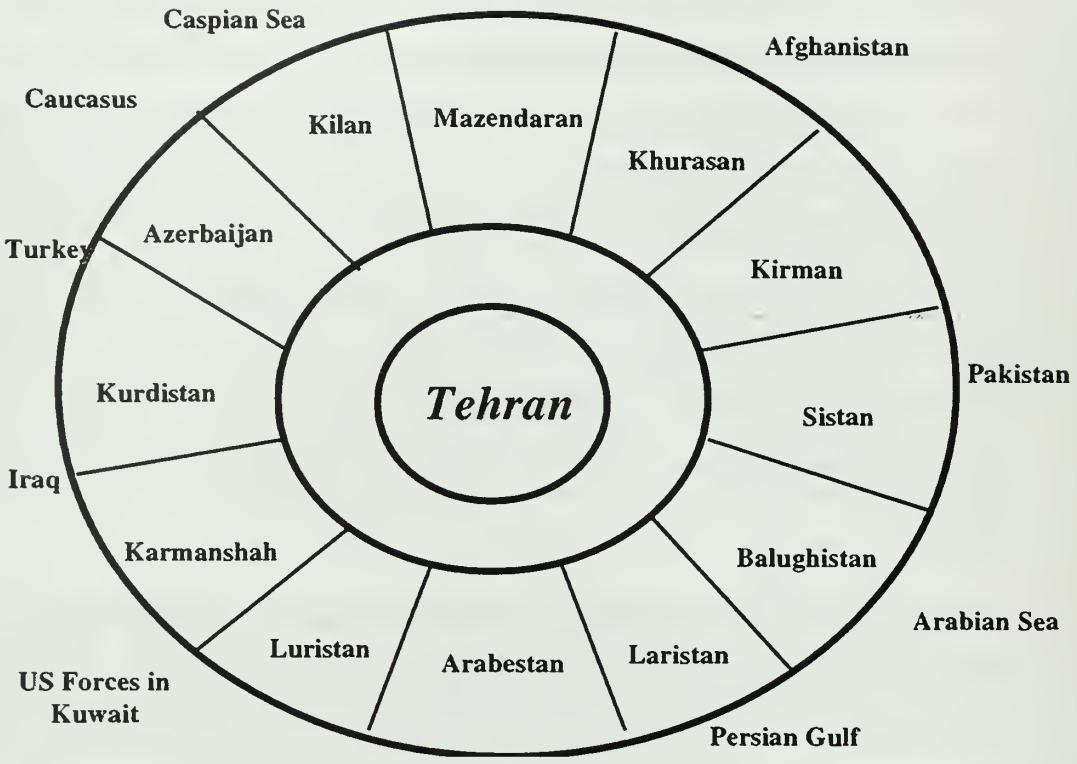

FIGURE 3. Iranian Provincial Jurisdictions Arrayed Against Neighbor States Illustrate Tehran's Sense of Embattlement

The Islamists and many of the nationalists are keen to strengthen the grip of central authority in the provinces and to deploy military force to counter the power of irredentist forces, while some elements of the exiled nationalists view tribal reassertion as a useful means of weakening the Islamic regime.[36]

Further, largely thanks to Iran's launching of its post-war five-year economic plans and its lingering economic crisis, in broad terms the country's economic priorities have begun to influence Iran's foreign policy. Tehran's moderation and its *realpolitik*

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[36]Karasik, Theodore. *Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and Future Persian Gulf Security* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1993), 38-39; and "Irredentist Campaign Among Azeris in Iran," *Daily Digest* (Prague: Open Media Research Institute, 3 September 1996), on the internet at http://www.hri.org/ news/agencies/pbp/pbp-info.html [Accessed 23 February 2000].

policy are the main features of this behavioral change. Likewise, Iran's contacts with neighbors and the abandonment, at least at the formal level, of *export of the revolution* to the rest of the region, Arab and non-Arab alike has allowed Tehran to reopen lines of communication closed since 1979.[37] Economic necessities—the need for foreign capital and expertise, trade links, importance of expatriate resources, the need to diversify its economy—have in turn affected Iranian economic policy decisions. This has created a *symbiotic* relationship between Iran's economic necessity and its foreign policy with regard to Central Asia.[38] Keen competition with Turkey for this economic prize has greatly influenced friction between the two. Therefore, while it is true to say that Tehran has been redefining its priorities in recent years and has been reconsidering Iran's place in the world, it would be unrealistic to expect it to abandon the system's *modus operandi* or indeed to forego its Islamic profile purely for the sake of economic gains. This indeed is the view of many in the clerical establishment. As Amirahmadi notes, "As long as Iran and the Islamic movements (in the Muslim world) espouse the same ideals and radical ideology, this congruity of purpose will enhance the visibility of Iran and its strength in international politics."[39] Tehran will continue to capitalize on Islam in its international profile as it fits its national security goals in neorealist terms.[40] Stated another way, "the fulfillment of domestic objectives has indeed necessitated a restructuring of Iran's foreign policy." [41] A corollary to national politico-military strength is that the leadership has developed a perception of Iran's role in the region based less on Iran as the hub of an

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[37]Entessar, Nadir. "Realpoltik and Transformation of Iran's Foreign Policy: Coping with the 'Iran Syndrome,'" in Hamid Zangeneh, editor. *Islam, Iran, and World Stability* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 33.

[38]Clawson, Patrick. *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, April 1994), 65.

[39]Amirahmadi, Hooshang. "Iran and the Persian Gulf: Strategic Issues and Outlook," in Hamid Zangeneh, editor, *Islam, Iran, and World Stability* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 118.

[40] Waxman, Dov. *The Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Revolution and Realpolitik.* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 1998), 36.

[41]Ehteshami, Anoushiravan and Hinnebusch, Raymond A. *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System.* New York: Routledge, 1997), 55-56.

expanding Islamic revolution, but rather as regaining its position as a militarily powerful and politically influential player in the region—towards becoming a regional power.[42]

B. IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IMPERATIVES

The primary motivating factors in Iran's national security policy behavior since the end of the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran War have been:

- To preserve Iran's territorial integrity;
- To avoid international isolation;
- To promote foreign trade, investment and commercial avenues for the technology transfers required for sustainable development; and
- The removal of US presence and hegemonic influence in the Persian Gulf. Iranian elite have a definite anxious perception that their country is surrounded by unstable states and latent conflict. This is of paramount importance to Tehran.[43]

Iran has no outstanding claims to territory not already under its control; however, some bordering states, including Iraq and the UAE, have claims against Iranian territory, suggesting that Iran's need for forces to repulse attack is real. The desire for military balance is the primary driver of Iranian security policy objectives between itself and its regional neighbors—particularity Iraq—who continue to make claims against Iranian territory.[44]

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[42]Ibid.

[43] Boyne, Lexis-Nexis.

[44] "UAE Voices Strong Objection to Iranian Measures in Abu Musa Island," *ArabicNews.com* (22 February 1999), on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed on 23 October 1999]; "Iran-UAE Dispute," *ArabicNews.com* (24 December 1997), on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed on 23 October 1999]; and "GCC Supports UAE Over Island Issue," Internet.

After the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, he declared Iran would be "Neither West nor East (but) Islamic."[45] In so doing, Iran joined the "Non-Aligned Movement" (NAM), which chose neutrality in the Cold War stalemate;[46] although this appears to be ideologically driven this position can in fact compliment a neorealist outlook. By choosing NAM Iran gained needed flexibility in its policy to consolidate the Islamic Revolution. With this stance Iran positioned itself to better achieve the new national security objectives of the nation: (1) autonomy in foreign policymaking, (2) avoidance of costly involvement in the Cold War rivalry, (3) the end Iran's dependence on a single ideological camp, and (4) the improvement of ties with all states.[47] Moreover, Iran looks to its Constitution, ratified following the 1979 revolution, to provide general guidance. Germane elements to our discussion include: protecting the independence and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic; practicing non-alignment toward hegemonic states and mutually peaceful ties with non-hegemonic ones; rejecting any form of hegemony; and defending the rights of all Muslims around the world.[48]

1. Evolving Policy Strategies

A combination of strategic location and energy resources has made Iran a focus for great power interest and competition throughout the modern period. This fact has profoundly affected Iranians' perceptions of the world, of the historical process and of international relations.[49] All Iranian governments, whatever their political orientation, have developed their foreign policy against this background, and have tried to develop strategies accordingly. In essence, the aim has been to balance the great powers in a way that best serves the interests of Iran, by allowing it to defend its sovereignty and integrity

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[45] Sadri, Houman A. "An Islamic Perspective on Non-Alignment: Iranian Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice," *Journal of Third World Studies* (Americus, Fall 1999), 35-36.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid. This is true with the exception of Israel, which Iran declared as an enemy of the Islamic people.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Fuller, Graham E. *The Center of the Universe: the Geopolitics of Iran.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 17-23; and Hunter, Shireen T. *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade.* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 37-45.

against their ambitions and intrigues. Throughout the 20th century, Iran has used various approaches with varying degrees of success. Some examples include positive equilibrium (offering something to both powers); negative equilibrium (refusing concessions to either power); third-party strategy (encouraging the involvement of another Western power, such as France and Germany, to offset the great powers' influence); and alliance with one or other power.[50] As the international dynamic has changed—from early British hegemony, to the Cold War alliance with the US, to the post-Islamic Revolution non-alignment strategy—so too has Iran's approach to foreign policy and national security.[51]

The post-Khomeini leadership's responses to the challenges Iran faces—especially concerning its relations with Turkey—have included a number of reactions, which support the neorealist primacy of their approach. Perceived essential national security concerns are given primacy in relations with neighboring states by the insistence on the principle of territorial integrity and the readiness to cooperate with neighboring states on mutual non-interference in internal affairs.[52] Whereas under Khomeini Iran sought confrontational policies, the post-Khomeini leadership has progressively diverted from this course to concentrate on economically enhancing policies. While there can be no doubt that Iran's ideological commitments often clash with its national geopolitical and economic interests[53] one can also identify areas where other interests—such as long-term security over short-term economic gains—do not harmonize.[54]

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[50] Herzig, Edmund. *Iran and the Former Soviet South* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 4.

[51] Mottaghi, Ibrahim. "The Trend, Indices and Challenges of the Unipolar Security Model in the Persian Gulf," *Rahbord,* Tehran, Iran: Strategic Research Center of the Presidential Office of Iran, no. 10 (Summer 1996), 119-121.

[52] Ibid., 122; and Herzig, 5.

[53] Examples of this are the Salman Rushdie affair and Iran's continued intransigence with the US.

[54] An illustration of this is Iran's seizure of Abu Musa and the Tunbs islands in the Persian Gulf, discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven of this work.

In laying this contextual framework for analysis, it is important to understand Iran's policy evolution over the last two decades. In brief, Iran's non-alignment policy evolved through several trends. These include a two-track policy (1979-July 1982), a confrontational policy (July 1982-June 1985), a conciliatory policy (June 1985-1993), and a policy of engagement, or what some have dubbed Tehran's "charm offensive" (1993-2000). The Two-Track policy began with Bazargan's government and ended when Iran moved the Iran-Iraq War into Iraqi territory in July 1982. Shifting from defensive operations to offensive operations led some to argue that Tehran was exporting its revolution, although this was a poor example of it. Consequently, this action signified the start of a confrontational policy period. The need to achieve a balance between the management of Iran's geostrategically shaped external environment, domestic legitimacy, and economics underlies Tehran's adoption of more conciliatory foreign policies in recent years.

First, the origin of the regime in an ideological revolution initially imparted a revisionist drive to export the revolution, which challenged most of Iran's neighbors and encouraged Iranian intervention in Arab politics; most notably through Tehran's mobilization of the Shi'a, its alliance with Syria, and its attempt to *Islamicize* the Arab-Israeli conflict.[55] The war with Iraq, which this precipitated and the failure to export the revolution against obstacles such as the Sunni-Shi'a gap, exhausted revolutionary fervor as the driving force in foreign policy. The regime is still dependent on the legitimacy lent by the Islamic revolution, manifest in foreign policy largely in Iran's symbolic "dramatic actor"[56] behavior.

Second, geopolitical realities of Iran's location are a factor compelling Tehran's suspicious response to both external and internal threats. On one hand, Iran would like a degree of isolation to confidently posture itself against the threats of external powers (such as Iraq and the U.S.) and from domestic irredentist groups. On the other hand, Iran

[55] Milani, 55.

[56] Calvert, Peter, *The Foreign Policy of New States* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), 143.

is a large state (both in geographic size and population)—straddling the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Central Asia—seeking to establish a sphere of influence within its region of the world.[57] Shifts in the international and regional balance of power against Iran have been manifest in defeats by Iraq, US intervention against Iran in the Gulf, and UN Resolution 598, which were all decisive in shifting the internal intra-elite power balance towards factions advocating more neorealist foreign policies. A response more to the geopolitical forces in play than to the dogmatic ideology of Khomeini's revolutionary tenets.

Third, economic factors, cutting more than one way, have also heavily influenced Iranian foreign policy today. Oil provides a base of power, particularly allowing acquisition of military capabilities, while control of oil revenues gives the regime autonomy internally. Yet, Iran's sole economic dependence on petroleum also made it extremely vulnerable to any shift in oil price. During the Iran-Iraq War, the accompanying economic crisis, of which the 1986 fall in oil prices was a watershed, was a major factor in the adoption of its neorealist posture by Iran's leaders. Continuing economic constraints from low oil prices, foreign exchange shortages, debt and falling living standards have only reinforced this orientation among both the Iranian political moderates and the populace in general.[58] The imposition of sanctions on virtually all-economic intercourse with Iran has adversely affected the country's ability to get its economic house in order. When two US Executive Orders, issued in March and May of 1995, imposed severe trade sanctions on Iran, its currency exchange rate plummeted against the dollar, forcing Tehran to institute exchange controls and reduce its foreign trade to bring the rate back in line.[59] A number of large oil companies, especially those

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[57] Discussed at length in Ahrari, M. E. and Noyes, James H. *The Persian Gulf After the Cold War.* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993); Arnett, Eric. *Military Capacity and the Risk of War: China, India, Pakistan and Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Nardulli, Bruce, et al. *Future Gulf Dynamics and US Security (*Santa Monica, California, The RAND Corporation, 1994).

[58] Evidence of this is found in President Khatami's almost 70 percent popular victory in the 1997 Iranian Presidential election and over 80percent of the popular vote in 2000.

[59] Bunce, Peter J. and Offer, Derel F. *Dual Containment and Iran: Understanding and Assessing US Policy. (*Colorado Springs, Colorado: Institute for National Security Studies, US Air Force Academy, June 1997), 24-25.

which had extensive US operations, put their negotiations with Iran on hold while they assessed the potential effects of US sanctions on their own business interests. Likewise, Iran was denied development loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Japan has been persuaded to withhold credits for a hydroelectric project in southern Iran. Stringent US visa and monetary regulations hindered all aspects of Iranian interaction with the US, from commercial and professional contacts to family visits and academic exchanges.[60]

This policy shift was noted after the Presidential victory of moderate Rafsanjani and the ensuing domestic factional conflict between Rafsanjani-Khamenei.[61] Economic troubles also strengthened the pragmatists' hand against the radicals. Khomeini's death allowed the neorealist camp to consolidate foreign policy power in a dual leadership structure. The conservatives believed they could continue to dominate this partnership, however, this has not been the case.[62] This shift has become more striking with the election, and subsequent re-election, of the moderate Mohammad Khatami in 1997 and 2000, respectively. Both Rafsanjani and Khatami, hoping to improve relations to ease the animosities of their regional neighbors and to improve Iran's economic footing with the international community, have sought to lower its profile concerning Islamist extremist groups.[63] But this has been problematic due to Iran's unique power sharing between the offices of the President and Supreme Leader, causing an uneasy factional coexistence.[64]

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[60] Zangeneh, Hamid. "The Post-Revolutionary Iranian Economy: A Policy Appraisal," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 6, no. 2 (October 1998), on the internet at http://web.nps.navy.mil/~relooney/3040_250.pdf [Accessed 21 September 2000].

[61] Sick, Gary G. and Potter, Lawrence G., editors. *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays on Politics, Economics, Security, and Religion.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 20.

[62] Ramazani, Ruhollah K. "The Shifting Premise of Iran's Foreign Policy: Towards a Democratic Peace?" *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998), 182.

[63] Stevens, Paul J. "Oil and the Gulf: Alternative Futures," in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence Potter, editors. *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 93.

[64] For discussions on this see Toni, David R. *Iranian Foreign Policy Making: Domestic Factionalism and its Implications for US Policy* (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, September 1998); and Macler, Todd P. *The Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy* (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, September 1999).

The muting of this internal factionalism and ideological drive allowed policy to focus on the pragmatic areas of economics and geostrategic power balances in the region. The restoration of global ties crucial to economic health became a major priority. Tehran also seeks to deflect geopolitical threats[65] and exploit external opportunities.[66]

Additionally, the neorealist aspect of Iranian policy decisions more accurately explains Tehran's state behavior in vital issues of its perceived national security situation, clearly demonstrating this approach in its policymaking. Neorealists, by definition, are only concerned with issues that effect the security of a nation: "The survival motive is taken as the ground of action where the security of the state is not assured, rather than as a realistic description of the impulse that lies behind every act of state."[67] In issues regarding regime survival, neither domestic politics, nor the composition of the political elite, nor regime ideology has made a difference in Iran. When confronted with annihilation by the Iraqi's during the Iran-Iraq War, Iran abandoned its efforts to isolate itself from the international system and sought arms from its most repugnant ideological enemies, the US, Israel, and the Soviet Union.[68] It engaged in balancing behavior, allying with Syria, a secular state based on Arab nationalism.[69] It sought to market its oil to any nation that would purchase it, often selling on the spot market to American companies below the posted price. Iran sought to undermine the forces arrayed against it in the Gulf through conciliatory policies toward regimes such as those of the UAE and Qatar, which were sympathetic to its views.[70]

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[65] For example, American attempts to isolate Iran through dual containment and the peace process.

[66] For example, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the opening of Central Asia to Iranian influence.

[67] Waltz, 92.

[68] Chubin, Shahram. "The Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in the Gulf." in Martin Kramer, editor, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 163; and Karsh, Efraim. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis," *Adelphi Papers,* No. 220, Spring 1987), 9.

[69] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 88-90.

[70] Cordesman, Anthony H. *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE: Challenges of Security* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 56; and Kruse, 109.

2. The Islamic Revolution

The 1979 Iranian Revolution opened up a new chapter in foreign relations for Iran. Change constituted the very essence of the revolutionary project. This project was, primarily, a universalization of the world involving all of humanity. It aimed to reconstruct the social order and communicate its "conception of the universe" to the whole world.[71] With the Islamic revolution, the foreign policy of Iran abandoned the resolutely pro-Western stance, which had typified the previous regime, in favor of an Islamic one.[72] Islamic foreign policy conceptually divides the world into *Dar al Islam* and *Dar al Shirk*.[73] Olivier Roy remarks that...

> According to this theory, there is no territorialized national state endowed with frontiers and a legal personality. Al Umma, the community of believers, is not divided into state, and furthermore, the "infidel state" should not be put on equal footing. The very basis of modern diplomacy—relations between sovereign states which are theoretically equal—is missing.[74]

Tehran's embrace of realpolitik quickly followed the successive failures of revolutionary policy when applied to foreign policy. Shi'ite Iran did not manage to bridge the gap between Shi'ites and Sunnites in the Muslim world, nor to place itself at the head of the Sunni dissenting movements, whether in Egypt, Afghanistan or Algeria. Iran has

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[71] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995), 21.

[72] Cordesman, Anthony H. *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 155.

[73] *Dar al-Islam* (Islamic State) is the land where Islamic Law is implemented in all matters of life and ruling and whose security is maintained in the name of Islam even if its citizens are non-Muslims. *Dar al-Shirk* is the land where Kufr laws are implemented in all matters of life and whose security is maintained in the name of Kufr even if all its citizens are Muslims. The Qu'ran uses the word Kufr to denote people who cover up or hide realities. The Qu'ran uses this word to identify those who denied Allah's favors by not accepting His Dominion and authority. This is because the criterion of a region being *Dar al-Islam* or *Dar al-Shirk* are the laws that are implemented there, the security by which it is protected, and the criterion is not the religion of its citizens. Despite statements to the contrary today, there is not a single state where Islamic laws are exclusively implemented in ruling and life's affairs; therefore all of them are considered *Dar al-Shirk*, although their citizens are Muslims.

[74] Roy, Olivier. "Sous le Turban, al Couronne," in *Thermidor en Iran* (Brussels, Belgium, 1993), 92-138.

been unable to replace Saudi Arabia as the backer of Sunni movements, reducing Tehran's takeover, instead, of smaller Islamic fringe-groups of minor political importance. Nor has the country been very successful in destabilizing conservative regimes in other Muslim countries or inspiring any significant movement in Turkey. As a result, the leadership has returned to more neorealist objectives. Even if their neighbors' ideologies conflict with that of Iran, Tehran aims to maintain good relations with these regional nations, making its presence felt by providing various useful services or taking part in peace negotiations. Iran also wishes to strengthen its economic links with these neighbors. This does not necessarily represent a change of aims and objectives, but rather a correction of its strategic course.[75]

C. THE CASE STUDY EVIDENCE

These case studies of Iranian relations and national security policy focus, for the most part, during the period since the 1979 Islamic revolution. There are four chapters consisting of case studies of Iranian relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and the Persian Gulf states of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Each study reveals Iran's neorealist behavior as a primary influence in its policy and national security decisionmaking. This evidence illustrates Iran's neorealist approach to security policy: surrounded by hostile neighbors and a powerful external power (the United States), Iran uses whatever means available to power balance against these threats.

These threats—Turkey to the northeast, Iraq to the west, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States to the south, and the presence of US forces throughout the Middle East—are a chief concern to those foreign policy imperatives already discussed. Still in a weakened position due to the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War and the economic stranglehold US sanctions and influence in the international financial circles, Tehran has had to rely upon more unconventional means to power balance against these international forces through the use and support of terrorism. When taken together these case studies

[75] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 156.

demonstrate the key tenets of national security, territorial integrity, power balancing against regional and interregional hegemony, and domestic cohesiveness predicate Iranian national security policy.

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IV. IRAN AND AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS CASE STUDY

The following case study typifies the contention that neorealism underlines Iran's national security policy. The argument preached by several experts that Iran's ideological predisposition in its policy machinations is proven false in the examination of Iran's dealings with Azerbaijan after the latter's independence from the former Soviet Union. When Azerbaijan's political scene descended into chaos between Muslim and Christian factions, Tehran did not back the Muslims as many might anticipate. Instead, Iran was pragmatic in its actions, backing the Christian elements within Azerbaijan over the Islamic fundamentalist faction. Why would they do this? The answer is an obvious one when placed in the neorealist framework. The following case study will show that the events in Azerbaijan during this period threatened Iran's territorial integrity, its internal stability, and potentially its balance of power with Turkey in the Caspian region. These are all rational concerns dictating rational choices by Iran's weak leadership.

A. BACKGROUND

Several issues have complicated Iran-Azerbaijan relations since the Azeri's independence in the early 1990s. Ultimately these boil down to questions of identity and nationality in both countries,[76] but the tense dynamics of the relationship derive in large part from the fluidity and volatility of post-Soviet Azerbaijani politics. Iran professes itself a multi-ethnic Islamic society, but there are strict limits on the degree of autonomy allowed to its minority nationalities. With an Azerbaijani population reckoned as high as 20 million,[77] mostly living in northwestern Iran adjacent to the Azerbaijan Republic border, all political factions in Tehran are concerned about irredentist Azerbaijani nationalism. So far, there is no evidence of widespread support for this in Iran. There were anti-government riots in Tabriz, as in many other Iranian cities, in 1994, but the

[76] Fuller (1990), 172-6.

[77] Ibid., 174.

grievances seem to have been socio-economic and cultural rather than nationalist.[78] Iranian-Azeris have a distinct and more Iranian sense of identity than their northern cousins and there can be no doubt that 70 years of Soviet rule have left significant differences in outlook and aspiration between them.[79] Moreover, Azerbaijan has its own minorities—among them the Talesh, an Iranian people concentrated near the border with Iran. It is worth noting that the short-lived 1993 Talesh separatist movement attracted little popular support and received absolutely no backing from Tehran.[80]

1. Ancient Connections

Azerbaijan is located on Iran's northern border in between Turkey and the Caspian Sea. Formerly territory of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan became an independent state shortly after the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s. Many believe Azerbaijan sits on top of large deposits of oil, which extends into the central Caspian Sea. It has also experienced armed conflict with Armenia over ethnic and territorial issues. Despite its recent dominance by the Soviets, the stronger historical links for Azerbaijan are with Iran, having been apart of the Persian Empire for 2,500 years before the Russo-Persian wars ended this arrangement in the first half of the nineteenth century.[81] In every period, changing policy reflects the frustration and helplessness felt by Iran towards the great powers that dominated the country for over 200 years. Thus frustration and helplessness are compounded by memories associated with having been constantly invaded throughout

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[78] For example, the frustrations experienced by Iranian society over the draconian Islamic social restrictions.

[79] Porkhomovsky, Victor Ya. "Historical Origins of Interethnic Conflicts in Central Asia and Transcaucasia," In Vitaly V. Naumkin, editor, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 1-30.

[80] O'Balance, Edgar. *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-199 (*New York: New York University Press, 1997), 145; and Herzig, 26.

[81] Cornell, Svante E. "Iran and the Caucasus," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 5, no. 4 (January 1998), on the internet at http://www.mepc.org/journal/9801_cornell.html [Accessed on 26 March 2000] and Cornell, Svante E *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus (*Surrey, England, United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 1999), 3-4.

history, in turn by the Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Afghans, Russians and British, respectively.[82]

Iran is composed of numerous nationalities. Not all of them speak Persian or are Persian in origin—the Azeris, the Turkmens and the Baluchis, for example. Due to the nation-building process begun in the 16th century by the Safavids, and later through the process of modernization by Reza Shah in the early 20th century, modern Iran incorporated these minorities. It was under Reza Shah that the idea of a national state developed, particularly in the 20th century.[83] Iran remains nervous of tendencies toward autonomy within its borders—tendencies which have sometimes been exploited by political groupings, and even encouraged by foreign powers. There is a fear (even if such a possibility seems unlikely) that Russia or some other neighbor will take the risk of encouraging a revolutionary or separatist movement.[84]

Although the historical, cultural and political debates surrounding the issue of Azerbaijani identity cannot be explored here in depth, the central arguments can be given in broad outline. Most Iranians consider that their Azeri fellow-citizens are, and for centuries have been, fully accepted as part of the populations of Iran. Largely no "Balkanizing" attitudes exist. In fact, many Iranians point to the thorough integration of Azerbaijanis into society—including within the national elite circles—and their great contribution to Iran's modern history and culture as being inclusive. Many Iranian-Azeris, if they have any reunification feelings at all, believe that the new Azerbaijan Republic should rejoin Iran, seeing them as being stolen away in the 19th century by imperialist Russia.

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[82] Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Mystifications of the Past and Illusions of the Future." in Nikki R. Keddie and EricHooglund, editors. *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic (*Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 154.

[83] Cronin, Stephanie. "Opposition to Reza Khan Within the Iranian Army, 1921-26," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (October 1994), 724-750; Elwell-Sutton, L.P. "Reza Shah the Great: Founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty," in George Lenczowski's, editor, *Iran Under the Palavis* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 1-50; and Ghods, M. Reza, "Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 1991), 35-45.

[84] Coppetiers, Bruno, editor. *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), 155.

2. The Imperialist Years

The Azerbaijan Republic was part of Iran in the very early 19th century, but it was lost to Russia in the Russo-Persian wars. According to the Turknianchai Treaty of 1828, the border between the two countries became the Araxes River, which effectively cut in two the lands inhabited by the Azeri people.[85] Due to the weak central governments in both Russia and Persia at the time, the new borders between the latter and the Transcaucasia remained reasonably open until 1921 when Iran reluctantly accepted its loss and signed a new treaty with the Soviet Union. Therefore, these countries, in particular Azerbaijan, have had very strong historical, cultural, and religious links with Iran. For instance, the founder of the Safavid Empire, which instituted Shi'ite Islam as the state religion of Iran in the 16th century, was Azeri in origin. Likewise, the present spiritual leader of the Islamic Republic, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is an ethnic Azeri-Iranian. Of all the Central Asian and Caucasian countries, Azerbaijan is the only country with a Shi'ite majority (about six million in Azerbaijan and twenty million in Iran). The Azeris played a crucial role in both the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911[86] and the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979. It was partly in recognition of their contribution to the latter revolution that the new constitution of the Islamic Republic allows the Azeris to use their own language and practice their own culture to a greater extent than had been the case under the Pahlavi Shahs who feared that allowing greater cultural freedom to Azeris might encourage them to demand autonomy and later join with Soviet Azerbaijan.[87]

3. The Coming of the Iron Curtain

Tehran's fear of Azeri irredentism extends from the experience Iran had with Soviet Azerbaijan, for not long after World War II when Iran nearly lost its own

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[85] Porkhomovsky, 8-9.

[86] Afray, Janet. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 34; and Porkhomovsky, 15.

[87] Tarock, Adam. "Iran's Foreign Policy Since the Gulf War," in Paul J. White and William S. Logan, editors. *Remaking the Middle East*. Oxford: Berg, 1997), 82; and Tarock, Adam. *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology* (Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1999), 132-33.

Azerbaijan province to the Soviet Union. The Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP), established in 1945, was supported by Russian troops who had occupied part of Iran during the war. The ADP's objective was the creation of an autonomous communist state that would then be detached from Iran and join with the Soviet Azerbaijan.[88] This attempt failed, ironically, due primarily to the lack of support of the Azeri-Iranian community, as well as great diplomatic pressure the US placed on Moscow to honor its agreement calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran six months after the end of World War II. The Soviets complied and, following the withdrawal of the Red Army, sealed the borders between the "two Azerbaijans." For many years, both family and personal contacts between the divided Azeris were very much restricted. The détente between the Superpowers in 1972 reduced tensions enough that the Soviets allowed many of the followers of the *Tudeh* Party[89] of Iran to reestablish or continue to maintain their ties with the Iranian dissidents and the extreme left who had taken refuge in Central Asia and the Caucasus.[90]

In the Azerbaijan Republic, nationalist interpretation is very different. Azerbaijanis are ethnic Turks, viewing ancient Azerbaijan as the victim of a series of conquests, which altered the destiny of the "nation." Iran is one of these conquerors. In their minds, all ethnic Azerbaijanis should seek reunification to fulfill their destiny. It is this sentiment that Iran fears the most from its northern neighbor, and it is from this security concern Iran has formulated its policy strategy throughout the 1990s.

4. Demise of the Soviet Union

When Soviet Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991, Iran became concerned that some people in the Azerbaijan Republic might call for the "reunification" of the former Soviet Azerbaijan with the "Motherland, Iran."[91] The sentiments of the Azeris on

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[88] Porkhomovsky, 24.

[89] The *Tudeh* Party is the Communist Party of Iran.

[90] Mohsenin, Mehrdad. "Iran's Relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Iranian Journal of International Affair* (Fall 1995), 839.

[91] Tarock (1999), 133.

both sides appeared to be more in favor of the Azeris in the republic to unite with Iran. According to a nationalist leader, quoted in an Iranian newspaper, the Azeri republic should now regain its original identity and reunite with the "Motherland, Iran."[92] The newspaper said that the Baku Azerbaijan Salvation Committee, composed mainly of intellectuals and politicians, has called on the Baku government to consider seriously the possibility of reunification.[93] This sentiment supports Cornell's assertion that "most Azeris in Iran, given their history as its rulers in certain periods, consider Iran to belong to them as much as to the Persians—certain Azeri political movements (in the republic) actually demand not a unified Azeri state, but the incorporation of north Azerbaijan (the Azerbaijan Republic) into Iran."[94] However, appealing to the nationalistic sentiments of the Azeris on both sides of the border, such incorporation, if it had been taken up seriously, would have created great political problems for Iran; as Russia, the US, and Turkey would have had strongly resisted it. In spite of this, there is no evidence that either the Iranian or the Azerbaijani leaders ever encouraged such sentiments. Due to the historical and cultural links between the two Azerbaijanis, however, Tehran began to regulate travel between the republics by requiring temporary visas be obtained by Azerbaijani-Azeris visiting their relatives in Iran. To minimize population integration the clerical authorities have also made it known that any Iranian intending to marry a citizen from the Azerbaijan Republic must get a permit from the Iranian Ministry of Interior.[95]

In general, the Azeris on both sides of the border continue to maintain their historical and family contacts; however, a strong bond between the two peoples does not necessarily mean amicable relations between their respective governments. This is true of Tehran and Baku as well. Several factors contribute to this tension: (a) in the early

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[92] Rourke, John T. *International Politics on the World Stage* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1986), 66.

[93] Tarock (1999), 133.

[94] Cornell (1998), 53.

[95] Freij, Hanna Yusif. "States Interests vs. The Umma: Iranian Policy in Central Asia," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 73.

years of its independence where the Azerbaijan government showed obvious bias against Iran and favor for Turkey; (b) the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and Iran's apparent support for the latter; and (c) the exclusion of Iran, under pressure from the US, from partnership in the international oil consortium formed for the exploitation of oil and gas in Azerbaijan country and the Caspian Sea. [96]

5. The First Years of Azerbaijan Independence

Developments in Azerbaijan throughout 1989, including the tearing down of the border posts between Iran and Azerbaijan by anti-government forces, caused difficulties for Iran. However, its most serious foreign policy dilemma in Azerbaijan occurred when, following anti-Armenian riots in January 1990, Soviet troops were moved into Baku. This led to clashes between Soviet units and Azeri demonstrators, resulting in the killing or wounding of a large number of Azeri civilians.[97] Any strong Iranian reaction to such Soviet actions could have damaged their bilateral relations. There was even concern that, if they rose to the Azerbaijanis' defense, the Soviets might have used force against Iran itself. By contrast, the lack of Iranian support for the Azerbaijanis' plight could have damaged the chances of future relations and would have been easily manipulated by anti-Iranian forces in Iran. Also, segments of Iranian public opinion, notably the Azeri population, were agitating in favor of more active support for the victims of Soviet aggression. Yet, the government responded cautiously. Iran's Foreign Ministry based its position on the principle of respect for the independence and territorial integrity of all states and support for the legitimate aspirations of Azeri Muslims.[98]

In short, more than any other consideration—religious solidarity or temptation to export Khomeini's revolutionary ideology—the maintenance of its own territorial

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[96] Rubin, Barry. "The Geopolitics of Middle East Conflict and Crisis," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 3 (September 1998), on the internet at http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/index.html [Accessed on 21 February 2000]; and Tarock (1999), 134.

[97] Menashri, David. "Iran and Central Asia: Radical Regime, Pragmatic Politics," in David Menashri, editor. *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 88.

[98] Ibid., 88-89.

integrity guided Iran's policies. Iran did pay a certain price for its cautious approach with segments of Azerbaijani public opinion. Indeed, the Azerbaijani Pan-Turkist nationalists interpreted its stand as the modern-day version of the historic Russo-Iranian collusion to thwart Azerbaijan's aspirations for unity and independence. Nevertheless, during a period of relative stability following the Azeri nationalists coming to power in 1990, until the Azerbaijan Popular Front's (APF) accession to power and Abulfez Elchibey's presidency in June 1992, both sides took a number of measures to expand bilateral relations.[99] In addition to several mutual visits by high-ranking officials to Baku and Tehran, including a visit by President Mutalibov to Tehran in August 1991, several agreements for cooperation in various fields went unsigned. In addition, cultural associations carrying the name of the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi, a native of Ganja, formed in both Iran and Azerbaijan. However, many of these agreements remained only on paper, for the most part, because of political infighting in Azerbaijan and the overall instability and uncertainty that it created in the country. During this period, while the nationalists continued with their anti-Iranian rhetoric, relations at the governmental level remained good.[100]

B. THE PERCEIVED THREAT FROM AZERBAIJAN

Iran has many concerns with this new state that has risen from the ashes of the dismantled Soviet Union. Geopolitically, Iran must secure an over-700-kilometer-long border with Azerbaijan from refugees and spillovers of the fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[101] Moreover, recently found Caspian Sea oil fields have the potential of creating a very rich neighbor on the economically depressed Iranian northern frontier. However, the most distinctive feature of Iran's trepidation of the irredentist tendencies of their Islamist cousins in Azerbaijan concerns population demographics. After all, the majority of the Azeri nation is resident in northern Iran, not in the Caucasian republic:

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[99] Ibid., 89.

[100] Hunter, Shireen T. "Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners," in Ian Bremer and Ray Taras, editors. *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232. These agreements covered a wide range of projects between these two countries.

[101] Ghoreishi and Zahedi, 81.

the Republic of Azerbaijan contains roughly six million Azeris, whereas between 15 and 20 million ethnic-Azeris estimated living in northern Iran.[102] Thus, Iran's foreign policy posture has been very ambivalent and puzzling to Western analysts who tend to paint Iran's top policy goals as the support and export of radical Islamism. Concerning Azerbaijan, Iran found its national security needs paramount over ideological support for revolutionary Islamist groups, by supporting the Christian Armenians against their fellow Azeri Shi'a brethren.[103] Such an action does not fit the moniker of rogue exporter of radical Islamism awarded to Iran; however, from an international relations theorist position, Iranian actions make perfect sense.

At the level of interstate relations, the acerbic attitudes of Azerbaijan's leaders created considerable tension and confrontation between Baku and Tehran. The upsurge in Azeri nationalism and border violations in the late-Soviet period became a source of considerable anxiety to the Iranian regime. Likewise, the rise of the APF and Azerbaijan's determinedly pro-Turkish position immediately after independence, between March 1992 and June 1993, was the most disturbing for Iran. The APF leader, Abulfaz Elchibey, was an outspoken nationalist who had often called for reunification with Iranian-Azeris. Initially, Elchibey pursued an outspoken anti-Iranian/anti-Russian foreign policy, looking to Turkey and the West for support as a new democracy. Later in his short presidency, Elchibey's approach towards Iran softened,[104] but there was still a marked chill in relations until Heydar Aliyev, the leader of Nakhichevan, came to power on the back of Suret Huseinov's coup in 1993.

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[102] Karasik, 38.

[103] Cornell, Svante E. "Undeclared War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Reconsidered," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. XX, no. 4 (Summer 1997), on the internet at http://www-scf.usc.edu/~baguirov/azeri/svante_cornell.html [Accessed on 22 November 2000].

[104] Sajjadpour, S.K. "Iran, the Caucasus and Central Asia," in A. Banuazizi and M. Weiner, editors. The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands (London: I. B. Tauros, 1994), 203.

In the past Aliyev had also made remarks that would alarm Tehran,[105] but as president he has seen to Azerbaijan's best interest in maintaining balanced relations with Russia, Turkey, and Iran. As befits its pragmatic, neorealist outlook on policy, Tehran responded by offering him full support during the crises of September 1994 and March 1995, although many obstacles remained. For example, Aliyev's ready acceptance of Washington's rejection to Iranian participation in an Azerbaijani oil consortium has greatly angered Tehran. Consequently, Tehran has blocked the export of a wide range of goods into Azerbaijan and demanded that Baku begin paying for Iranian electricity supplies to Nakhichevan.[106]

1. The APF: Fanning the Flames of Nationalism and Pan-Turanism

The Abulfazel Elchibey government in Azerbaijan is illustrative of the difficulties in the relationship between the Azeribaijan and Iranian governments. The coming to power of the nationalist forces of the APF and, in particular, the assumption of the presidency by Elchibey in June 1992, was a significant setback for Iran. Those elements of the APF, which now gained power, espoused a philosophy that made a difficult relationship with Iran inevitable. To begin with, the irredentist and pan-Turkist attitudes were a direct threat to Iran. Following his inauguration, Elchibey turned Azerbaijan increasingly towards Turkey, as well as Egypt and Israel. As a result, during the brief period of the Elchibey presidency, the negative rhetoric between Baku and Tehran escalated. Elchibey failed to grasp the geopolitics of Azerbaijan, trapped as it was between two powerful neighbors, Russia and Iran, and a long-time foe to the west, Armenia. The official Iranian reaction to Elchibey's derogatory statements was still relatively calm. It seems that Tehran viewed Elchibey's presidency as a passing phase rather than a lasting phenomenon. Thus, it did not want to jeopardize future relations by over-reacting. However, the Iranian media was less tolerant and frequently accused the

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[105]Zviagelskaya, Irina D. "Central Asia and Transcaucasia: New Geopolitics," in Vitaly V. Naumkin, editor, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 144.

[106] "CENTCOM and Middle East Flashpoints: Caspian Sea Region," (26 August 1999) on the internet at http://www-cgsc.army.mil/djco/COURSES/ C500/lsn9/flshpts.htm#CASPIAN SEA OIL [Accessed 30 January 2000]; and Herzig, 28.

APF government of being in the service of imperialism or Zionism.[107] Nevertheless, geopolitical realities forced the two countries to maintain some degree of cooperation and, over time, as the high expectations of the Azerbaijani nationalists regarding their relations with Turkey and the West did not materialize, relations with Iran were somewhat revised. Especially significant was the Azerbaijani realization of Turkey's limitations in helping to bring about a favorable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Meanwhile, the antagonistic attitude of the Azerbaijanis may have led Iran to help Armenia by providing much needed fuel.[108]

As was stated at the beginning of this discussion, Iran bases its policy decisions not on the export of Islamic revolutionary ideology but on pragmatic security concerns centered on the integrity and security of the state. Iran follows a neorealist approach, which should be readily recognizable to Western analysts. In this case, Iran seeks a balance of power situation between the Christian Armenian and the pro-Turkish Azeribaijani camps. This policy course solved two immediate security concerns for Tehran. First, it countered Turkish designs for inroads into the Caspian Sea region. Second, it stifled potential separatist aspirations among its Iran's ethnic-Azeri populations. Moreover, it served to slowdown Baku's pursuit of oil riches. Iran is concerned over the potential of Azerbaijan becoming a "Central Asian Kuwait."[109] Such a wealthy northern neighbor would certainly draw the attention of Iran's economically strapped society—especially the Azeri-Iranians.

Unfortunately for the Azeris, Iran has constantly sought to cultivate and improve its relations with Armenia to counter the Azeri nationalists, whereas Turkey joined Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Likewise, Iran is one of Armenia's main trading partners, and according to recent reports it is also very active in

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[107] Tarock (1999), 117.

[108] Ibid., 117.

[109] Kutschera, Chris. "Azerbaijan: The Kuwait of the Caucasus?" *The Middle East* (London: March 1996), 16.

trading with the Karabakh-Armenians as well, being the major supplier of foodstuffs and other commodities to the enclave.[110]

a. Iran's Pragmatic Choice

Iranian policy does not seem to fit the preconceived notion that Iran is the sinister head of a global Shi'ite terrorist network and cannot be reconciled with those theories that give this ideologist support primacy in Iranian foreign policy thinking. These actions do fit the neorealist policy model where Iran seeks to balance against the perceived threat on its northern border. Likewise, domestic considerations connected to state integrity explain Iranian policy behavior.[111] How does a tiny country like Azerbaijan pose a threat to the Iranian regime? Iranian leaders in both domestic political camps seem to have seen the emergence of an Azerbaijani republic as a long-term threat to the integrity of the Iranian state. Tehran feared that their Azeri population would urge Iran to militarily intervene in Karabakh out of a sense of Azeri solidarity with their ethnic cousins. This anxiety existed despite the fact that the Iranian-Azeris were well integrated into the Iranian society, have a comparatively weak Azeri identity, and consider themselves more Iranian than Azei. In fact, there are allegedly Azeri movements in South Azerbaijan urging the integration of the Azerbaijan into Iran.[112]

From the realist approach, these circumstances explain why Tehran saw no imminent danger in pursuing an anti-Azerbaijani policy. The real threat perceived here is the potential congruence of economic challenges in Azerbaijan. With Iran's economic conditions (and by extension its social cohesion) continuing to deteriorate under US sanctions, the national identity of the Azeri minority in northern Iran could grow in proportion to popular dissatisfaction with the regime. This would be all the more

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[110] Karasik, 45; and Cornell (1998), Internet.

[111] Mohsenin, 842.

[112] Karasik, 45.

dangerous if Azerbaijan simultaneously prospered with the exploitation of the promising oil revenues mentioned.[113]

In 1992, this perception of threat was so strong that Iran saw fit to set up expensive refugee camps outside its own territory in record time. This was a significant undertaking for an economically-strapped nation such as Iran; however, these economic considerations as a whole seem to be secondary as far as the refugee issue is concerned. Tehran's speed in relocating the refugees indicates the perception in Tehran of a potentially explosive situation [114] As Hiro notes:

> Rafsanjani realized that in the long run, Azeri nationalism would prove as problematic for the Islamic regime in Tehran as it was proving then for the Communist administration in Moscow...The emergence of a strong, independent Azerbaijani republic whether Islamic or not - would fan the flames of Azeri nationalism within Iran.[115]

Iran's position towards Azerbaijan and its Azeri-Iranian minority is likely to remain ambivalent. So far the emphasis has been on positive engagement: there is more officially sanctioned use of the Azerbaijani language in Iran now than before 1989; border and visa controls are looser; Azerbaijan has been allowed to open a consulate in Tabriz; and each country has given some access to the other's broadcast media. Even so, Tehran keeps a close watch on developments.[116] Likewise, the injection of nationalism into the debate was an indirect chiding the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the concept of ethnic nationalism is totally alien to the multiracial Islamic community. In other words, nationalism per se is seen in Islam as a divisive concept. Irredentist proponents favored

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[113] "CENTCOM and Middle East Flashpoints: Caspian Sea Region," Internet; and STRATFOR, "Trans-Caucasus Issues," on the internet at <http://www.stratfor.com/hotspots/caspian/default.htmm> (30 November 1999) [Accessed on 30 January 2000].

[114] Cornell (1998), Internet.

[115] Hiro, Dilip. *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: Harper-Collins, 1997), 293.

[116] Herzig, 28.

the reunification of the "two" Azerbaijans and complained about Iran's trampling of its Azeri population's cultural and political rights. Elchibey also favored, at some point, the formation of a confederation between Azerbaijan and Turkey.[117]

Apart from the Islamic dimension of Turkic nationalism, such a concept would have national security implications for Iran, as shall be explained shortly. In any case, Elchibey was anti-Iranian, pan-Azeri, and turned Azerbaijan towards Turkey. He thought of Iran, as he thought of Russia, as a foreign power with expansionist policies in the region, policies that run counter to Azerbaijan's national interests. On several occasions, he reportedly blasted Iran as a doomed state, predicting the "reunification" of Iranian Azeris and Azerbaijan within five years. Elchibey further antagonized Russia when he took Azerbaijan out of the Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS), a move that resulted in Moscow's increasing support of Armenia. Inadvertently or not, the Elchibey government lost the support of both Iran and Russia. His government was short lived, overthrown in a military coup in June 1993, allegedly encouraged by Iran. But a more reasonable explanation would be that the coup was the consequence of his government's failure to manage effectively the Karabakh War, as well as Russia's support of Armenia.[118]

The Azeris also suspected Iran of involvement in support of radical Islamic political movements in Azerbaijan, as well as of encouraging ethnic unrest among Azerbaijan's Talysh minority, which lives near the Iranian border. Thus, the curious legacy of the Elchibey-era: an Islamic fundamentalist state, Iran, ended up supporting Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan. When Elchibey's regime fell in June 1993, a more amiable Azerbaijani administration sought to improve relations with Iran by offering several shares in the Caspian Sea oil consortium.[119]

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[117] Menashri, 116.

[118] Tarock (1999), 135.

[119] Ibid.

When Azerbaijan concluded the so-called "deal of the century" in 1994 with a consortium led by Western oil companies, Iran was initially given a five percent share of the deal. In April 1995, the United States forced Azerbaijan to exclude Iran from the deal, which naturally made the Iranians furious, accusing Aliyev of being a tool of the "great Satan." Iran immediately retaliated by cutting off power supplies to Nakhichevan, claiming non-payment of debts as a reason. In late 1995, Azerbaijan offered Iran a ten percent share in the extraction from another oilfield, Shah-Deniz, an offer Iran initially rejected as not serious. In May 1996, however, Iran finally accepted the offer, a decision illustrative of the Iranian regime's pragmatism. Although a certain degree of cooperation exists between the two countries, encouraged by Aliyev, the regime in Tehran still maintains a relatively hostile attitude to its northern neighbor.[120]

Nevertheless, despite these developments, the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have not improved significantly by the end of the 1990s, and the basic guidelines of Iranian policy towards Azerbaijan do not seem to have changed. Since this time, Iran has been counteracting all Azeri aims to produce and export its oil. One way of doing this has been to refuse to cooperate in a planned pipeline route between Baku and the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.[121] This route was intended to stretch from Baku into Iran, then follow the Araxes River and enter Nakhichevan and then into Turkey, where it could reach the Mediterranean.[122] Due to the impossibility of involving Armenia in any pipeline project, a route that would have been the more sense geographically this circuitous route was drawn. Iranian officials clearly stated that if a pipeline went through Iran, it would go to the Persian Gulf and not to Turkey; this solution would give Iran more royalties and control over the outlet of Azeri oil and hence important leverage on Baku.

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[120] Ibid.

[121] Zinin, Yuri N. and Maleshenko, Alexei V. "Azerbaijan," in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, edited by Mohiaddin Mesbahi. (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994), 122.

[122] "CENTCOM and Middle East Flashpoints: Caspian Sea Region," Internet ; and Cornell (1998), Internet.

2. Iran and the War in Nagorno-Karabakh

The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh presented a challenge to Iran's diplomacy in the Caucasus. Once again, however, Iran demonstrated a pragmatic, neorealist reaction vice an ideologically based one. This conflict had economic, political *and* security implications, and Iran could remain neutral, not take a one-sided stance vis-à-vis either of the two warring nations. Therefore, one of Iran's first significant political actions, and the one that demonstrated its ability to place pragmatism before Islamic ideology in the new republics, was its attempt to broker peace between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan.[123] However, Iran found itself in a difficult position. It did not want to see the Muslim side victorious due to the potential effects in Iran. However, the Iranian leaders could not overtly lend its support to the Christian Armenians at the expense of the Shi'ite Azeris due to the effects this might have on its Islamic legitimacy.

An illustration of the degree of Iranian fear of Azeri irredentism occurred in the summer of 1993. At this point, the Azeri military performance in Karabakh was plainly a disaster, and Armenian forces conquered territories of Azerbaijan proper east and south of Karabakh.[124] In October, the situation became critical for Iran, as the Armenians pushed towards the Iranian border, threatening to send a massive refugee flow into the country.[125] Indeed, a number of Azeri refugees did swim across the Araxes, where their ethnic kin on the other side welcomed them. The Iranian regime reacted quickly and moved to set up refugee camps for the fleeing Azeris—but on Azeri territory. Iran, which by November claimed to harbor over 40,000 people, forced the refugees back into Azerbaijan.[126] Another Iranian concern focuses on the reaction the Iranian-Azeri

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[123] Cornell (1998), Internet.

[124] Walker, Edward W. "No Peace, No War in the Caucasus: Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh" *Strengthening Democratic Institution* (February 1998), 45.

[125] Zviagelskaya, 142.

[126] Cornell (1998), Internet.

community would have if it became aware of the atrocities suffered by their ethinc-kin in the north. Tehran fears that there would be great potential of the Iranian-Azeri putting increased pressure on Tehran to intervene on Azerbaijan's side. Even more dangerous to the Iranian regime would be the risk of heightened Azeri ethnic mobilization within Iran in solidarity with the northern Azeris in their struggle against the Armenians.[127]

The first factor led Iranian radicals to condemn Armenia for using the cease-fires brought about by Iranian diplomacy to provide for rearmament. The second made mediation virtually impossible as President Elchibey refused to accept Iran as a mediator. To a certain degree, then, Iran had acted to resolve the conflict in a positive manner.[128] But Tehran simultaneously used the Nagorno Karabakh conflict to pursue foreign-policy goals. Since the conflict erupted into war in 1992, Iran has attempted to exert its influence on Azerbaijan. For the most part, this has meant working against Azerbaijan through support for Armenia.[129] Thus, it seemed as if Tehran was becoming aware of the danger of a collapse in Azerbaijan, which could have important implications for regional security.[130] Iran at several points made it clear that it sought to preserve the existing balance of power in the region, perceiving of crucial importance the Nakhichevan enclave once again. When Nakhichevan was under threat of an Armenian attack in September 1993, Iranian troops crossed the river Araxes, prompting a strong Russian reaction. Iran's action was enough to intimidate Armenia; the Armenian foreign minister assured Tehran that there would be no more attacks on Nakhichevan.[131]

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[127] "Irredentist Campaign Among Azeris in Iran," *Daily Digest* (Prague: Open Media Research Institute, 3 September 1996), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 23 February 2000].

[128] Zviagelskaya, 142.

[129] This has, however, not always been the case. When the conflict threatened to spill over into Iran, Tehran actually raised its tone against the Armenians.

[130] See Ramezananzadeh, Abdollah, "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis," in Bruno Coppetiers, editor. *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996); and Mohsenin, 834-853.

[131] Gunter, Michael M. "The Armenian Terrorist Campaign Against Turkey," *Orbis*, (Summer 1983), 67.

Another example of neorealism in Iranian policy concerning Azerbaijan is the fact that, except for situations where it was necessary to restore a balance by preventing Armenia from creating chaos in the region, Tehran used the conflict to pressure Azerbaijan. Iran accomplished this through different forms of support for Armenia to include allowing Iran to serve as a transit route for weapons heading to the Armenia Christians and training Armenian fighters in Iran. It is possible that Armenian factions have retained contacts with Iran from the time of the terrorist campaign against Turkey, which had its high tide in the early 1980s.[132] Azeris argue that ASALA[133] still exists, that its members receive training in Iran, and that ASALA has been one of the forces influencing the Armenian government of Nagorno Karabakh.[134]

Iran then also became involved in mediation efforts to end the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Theoretically, Iran had a better chance than other regional countries to play the role of mediator. It enjoyed a great deal of credibility with the Armenians and with certain segments of the Azerbaijanis. Additionally, because of its geographical position it could offer both sides considerable incentives. Most important, a close link with Iran would have given Armenia the confidence that Turkic peoples would not surround it. Indeed, during the spring of 1992, Iran negotiated a number of cease-fires between the two belligerents, which, needless to say, did not last long.[135]

When Iranian mediation efforts failed, and during the hostilities which followed the Azeris loss of the town of Khojaly in 1992, the nationalists accused Iran of having plotted the event with the Armenians and having used the mediation efforts as a cover. At the same time, the opponents of the APF accused it of having sabotaged their efforts, both on the war front and in the negotiations, to bring down the Mutalibov

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[132] Ibid., 68.

[133] The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia.

[134] Cornell (1998), Internet.

[135] Mensahri, 116.

government.[136] The failure of the Iranian mediation efforts—as well as many others—is derived from regional and international factors and from struggles and political infighting, especially in Azerbaijan. In fact, the entwinement of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and Azerbaijani domestic politics, coupled with regional and international competition for power, that its resolution became impossible before answers to the issues relating to those rivalries were found. For its part, Iran did not want others to succeed where it had failed. However, because of its other security problems, notably its acute vulnerability to instability in Azerbaijan, Iran was more eager to see the conflict resolved than were other states, which were less vulnerable to its disruptive effects.[137] Moreover, reflecting the realities of regional politics and rivalries, the Turkish Prime Minister, Suleyman Demirel, said that the Azerbaijanis would now realize that they should not look to Tehran for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Following these setbacks and in view of the changed political circumstances in Azerbaijan, Iran abandoned its mediation efforts, stating that it would resume them only if asked by both sides.[138]

Despite Iran's efforts, the cease-fire however did not last long. This was due partly to the fact that the Armenians continued to exploit their advantage in Azerbaijan territory and partly because the Azerbaijani leadership had only reluctantly accepted Iran as a mediator.[139] In the meantime, relations between Iran and Armenia had already deteriorated when Armenian forces shot down an Iranian plane on 17 March 1994, killing all 34 people on-board. The daily *Jumhuri-ye Islam*, a radical Islamic newspaper, urged the government to pressure Armenia to accept responsibility for the "crime," but the government made no great issue of the plane incident, as it did not want to take an uncompromising stance towards Armenia. In the end, it continued to urge both Armenia and Azerbaijan to solve their differences through negotiations. [140]

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[136] Cornell (1998), Internet.

[137] Mensahri, 116.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ramezanzadeh, 60.

[140] Tarock (1999), 137-8.

Sympathy for the Azerbaijan Republic was somewhat tempered by the fact that there is also a large Armenian minority (estimated between one million and one and a half-million people) in Iran who are fully integrated into Iranian social and political life. For example, they participated in both the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911[141] and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the constitution of the Islamic Republic, they are a recognized minority and as such have their own elected deputies in the Majlis. In the year immediately after World War II, many Armenian-Iranians went to Armenia but often visited Iran or otherwise maintained contacts with their relatives in Iran, and the official Iranian policy was to encourage such visits and contacts. In the past several years, the two countries have signed a number of trade and economic agreements. In mid-1995, the Armenian Prime Minister, Herand Bargratian visited Tehran and the two countries signed ten trade agreements. The most important of these agreements was the purchase of Iran's natural gas by Armenia, the construction of a pipeline, and the transfer of electricity to Armenia. Therefore, the war between the two countries over Nagorno-Karabakh put Iranian diplomacy to a great test, as Iran could neither be indifferent to the continuation of the war, nor the defeat of either side. In either case, Iran would have had internal and external ramifications for Tehran.[142]

Although the next chapter examines Iran-Turkey relations, it is worth noting here, a few key elements linked to Tehran's relations with Azerbaijan. Throughout the aforementioned crisis, Tehran sought to balance power with respect to the ongoing regional competition for influence and favor concerning oil concessions in the Caspian Sea basin.

Ideologically, secular Turkey and Islamist Iran are polar opposites. Naturally, each sees the other as an unwelcome example and source of inspiration to subversives within its own society. Iran generally sees Turkey as a pro-U.S., and now pro-Israeli, a

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[141] Browne, Edward G. *The Persian Revolution 1905-1909, New Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1995), 15.

[142] Tarock (1997), 93; and Tarock (1999), 136.

regional rival of growing strength—in short, as an agent and potential launching pad for its enemies. The field of Turkish-Iranian rivalry has widened considerably in recent years, now encompassing northern Iraq, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In northern Iraq, Turkey cooperates closely with Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, while Iran generally supports Barzani's rival, Jalal Talabani. In the Caucasus, Turkey firmly backs Azerbaijan in its dispute with Armenia, while Iran tilts heavily toward Armenia—both seeking a power balance against the other. Likewise, both Turkey and Iran hope to be the site of the main export pipeline for Caspian Sea energy. Moreover, Turkey's challenge for influence in Central Asia, closer Turkish and Israeli ties,[143] and suspected Turkish support of anti-Iranian groups like the Mujahedin-e Khalq[144] exacerbated Iran's tensions.

Thus, Iran had to balance against Turkey, which also shared a border with one of the combatants.[145] However, externally Iran had two very important advantages over Turkey insofar as the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is concerned. First, Turkey has no border with Azerbaijan, depending upon land routes through either Iran or Armenia. Second, Armenia closed the Turk's route to Azerbaijan due to the historical hostility between the Turks and Armenians. Last, and more importantly, because of this Turk-Armenian animosity, Ankara was in no position to gain favor acting as a mediator between the two warring nations.[146]

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[143] Makovsky, Alan. "Turkish-Iranian Tension: A New Regional Flashpoint?" *PeaceWatch*, Report Number 404 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute, 9 August 1999) on the internet at <www.washingtoninstitute.org> [Accessed 13 February 2000]. The Iranians particularly object to a 1996 Turkish-Israeli military cooperation agreement that allows Israeli jets to exercise in Turkish airspace four times a year. Iran's concerns that Turkey has brought the once-distant Israeli enemy to the edge of the Iranian border are fanned by numerous press reports suggesting that Turkey and Israel are cooperating in intelligence-gathering against Iran.

[144] Ibid. Tehran also suspects Turkey of subversion. It accuses Ankara of giving refuge to members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, opponents of the Iranian regime. (This is not quite the mirror-image of Turkey's accusations about Iranian support for the PKK, as Iran does not claim that the group uses Turkish territory to attack Iran.) Tehran also probably worries that Ankara seeks to subvert the Islamic Republic's large Turkic-language-speaking Azeri minority, which constitutes some one-fourth of Iran's population.

[145] Discussed in Piccoli, Wolfango. *Alliance Theory: The Case of Turkey and Israel* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, August 1999).

[146] Hale, William. "Turkey and Transcaucasia," in David Menashri, editor, *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 155.

Additionally, Iran did not—and *does not*—want the Azeris to win the war, as it would enhance Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan. Such a development could have the potential of turning Azerbaijan against Iran, if at some point relations between Tehran and Ankara reach a crisis point. Moreover, Iran would like to keep Turkey from gaining such leverage considering the very close relationship that exists between Turkey and the US, a nation Iran considers hostile to its sovereignty, and the military agreement signed between Ankara and Tel Aviv in February 1996.[147] The existence of a large Azeri minority in Iran naturally put pressure on the government to side unreservedly with the Azeri Shi'ites in the republic against the Christian Armenians. The Iranian leadership, however, did not—and does not—view the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia through a religious ideological lens. As pointed out earlier, Iran's ties with the Caucasians go back centuries. Likewise, there was in Iran a feeling that Azerbaijan's victory would create a refugee problem for Iran, as the country was still under the social and financial burden of sheltering some two and a half million Afghani and Iraqi refugees who fled to Iran from their own war-torn countries.[148]

C. SUMMARY

In summary, this case study of Iran-Azerbaijan relations clearly illustrates the argument that Iran's national security and foreign policy—when faced with the significant security threats of territorial integrity, internal domestic stability, and regional balance of power—is predicated on neorealist choices. Azerbaijan presented threats within all these dimensions of Iranian security concerns to the extent that the ideology of the "Islamic Revolution" was subordinated to threats to Iran's sovereignty.

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[147] Makovsky, Internet.

[148] Cornell (1999), Internet.

V. IRAN AND TURKEY RELATIONS CASE STUDY

Iran, being a weak state in the Persian Gulf region, has worked very hard to maintain the status quo in the balance of power among its neighbors. This is the case, and has been so for most of the 20th century, concerning Iran's relations with Turkey. In the period after 1979, Iran has remained distrustful of Turkish intentions in Azerbaijan, in the newly independent Central Asian states, and in northern Iraq. To the Iranian revolutionary both Turkey's secular government and its alliance with the US left little love between the two nations. Consistent throughout Tehran's dealings with Istanbul has been its policy choices favoring the protection against Iran's perceived threats to territorial integrity and the maintenance of the balance of power with Turkey directly and with Turkish "surrogates" along Iran's borders—like the Kurdish factions in northern Iraq. In all these examples, the power of the neorealist framework has influenced Iranian decisionmakers.

The following case study amplifies Iranian-Turkish relations, presenting evidence supporting the argument for a neorealist penchant in Iranian policymaking, despite the rhetoric produced for domestic consumption.

A. BACKGROUND

The history of the relationship between Iran and Turkey is old and complex. The father of modern Iran, Reza Shah, laid the foundation of modern Turkish-Iranian relations when he visited Turkey in 1934. This visit occurred at a time when both countries were struggling to overcome constraining historical traditions and to establish modern institutions to gain access to the West. This visit went far to overcome a legacy of conflict and warfare that stood between the two nations. During the Cold War, Iran viewed the rise of Turkish nationalism as a necessary method of withstanding the threat posed by the Soviet Union.[149] The Shah used Iranian nationalism as a defensive measure,

[149] Lesser, Ian O. *Turkey's Strategic Options* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1999), 5.

aiming to keep the country unified, whereas the perception that Turkish nationalist ideology was expansionist and a potential threat to Iranian sovereignty. Although Tehran was sometimes anxious, believing it could not depend on Turkey in a crisis (especially since the Sadabad Treaty had proved ineffective during World War II), the two governments continuously worked to ease tensions through negotiation.[150]

Over the last 20 years, Iran has gone through three distinctive phases: distrust and enmity; optimism and cooperation (during the year-long (1996-1997) pro-Islamic government of Necmetin Erkaban); and cautious amity since then. Historically, Iran and Turkey have been rivals for political and economic influence in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia for more than a century and a half. Further, although they were members in Western alliance systems such as the Baghdad Pact and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) for nearly three decades (1950-1979), Iranian-Turkish relations have rarely been easy. In fact, they have often been tense and acrimonious.

Constrained by short-term interests, Turkey was unable to play an intermediary role during the Iran-Iraq War. Nevertheless, the war benefited Turkey. Forced to rely on Turkey as a major source of needed commodities because of their international isolation, both Iran and Iraq imported either directly from Turkey or from suppliers through Turkey. Ankara's expectations of its relations with secular Iraq were higher than its expectations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Throughout the 1980s, the war with Iran gave Iraq an incentive to cooperate fully with Turkey, including the establishment of commercial exchanges between the two countries; with Turkey quickly became one of Baghdad's main customers. For example, 60 percent of the oil consumed by Turkey was imported from Iraq.[151] When Turkey saw that "Iraq was threatened with collapse under the battering of the Iranian advance," the Turkish nationalist Minister of State, Kamran Inan, publicly warned that 40 percent of Turkey's oil supplies came from Iraq's Kirkuk

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[150] Tarock (1999), 72.

[151] Lesser, 5.

region.[152] He also stated that "no less than one and a half million Turks and Turkomans [live] in the northern regions of Iraq."[153] Kamran Inan, in effect, wanted to assert Turkey's preemptive right in the event that an Iranian advance led to the breakup of Iraq,[154] which was a potentiality that concerned Iran as well. Likewise, although an Islamic country, Turkey's constant attempts to project a Western image have obscured its regional role. This is partly the result of its geopolitical position on the border of both Europe and Asia, and partly the outcome of having adopted Western norms that, in turn, favor political and cultural links with the West at the expense of the Islamic world. Turkey is the only Islamic country that continues to participate actively in Western cultural and military organizations. Iran has always rejected this involvement with the West, firmly believing that these attachments hinder Turkey's successful integration in regional organizations. Moreover, it is these organizations, which Tehran has viewed as necessary to deflect economic containment and force U.S. military presence from the region.[155]

After its long war with Iraq, Iran has had every reason to avoid conflict with Turkey, and Iranian officials have persistently tried, in spite of their differences, to reach an accord with Turkey. Some of Turkey's actions, however, have resulted in crises and provoked emotional responses in Iran. In February 1994, for example, the Turkish army bombed Iranian border villages in its pursuit of Kurdish activists from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK),[156] resulting in nine deaths and nineteen injured. The Iranian government's response to the bombing was cautious, enabling a group of Turkish investigators to go into Iran, after which the Turkish government apologized to Tehran.

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[152] Tarock (1999), 97.

[153] Ibid., 97.

[154] Picard, Elizabeth, "Relations Between Iran and its Turkish Neighbour: From Ideological to Geopolitical Constraints," in Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski, editors. *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 348-349.

[155] Ibid., 349.

[156] Pahlavan, Tschanguiz H. "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," in Barkey, Henri J., editor. *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 77.

Another example of poor Turkish judgment from Iran's viewpoint was the year-long detention of the freighter *Cap Maleas* on suspicion of arms smuggling for the PKK, and its release after an admission by the Turkish interior minister that the incident was the result of a mistake.

In addition, on 10 March 1994, an editorial in the Iranian government newspaper *Kaylan* depicted Turkey as being in a crisis, with its economy in shambles, the Kurdish problem unsolved, internal democratic forces repressed, and Islamic activism on the rise.[157] The same editorial suggests that, correspondingly, militarism in Turkey is on the rise and armament industries are anxious to expand. Consequently, Turkey has the potential of becoming one of the greatest military powers in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This kind of editorial, published in an official Iranian newspaper, indicates the level of anxiety that prevailed in Iran. It is Tehran's belief that due to domestic problems, including the conflict with the Kurds, Turkey may resort to war in the region. For example, General Gures's argument about Turkey's regional importance, published in an Iranian military journal, indicates just how much the Turkish situation might concern Iran.[158] Since Turkey is a friend of the U.S. in the region, it is natural for Iran to feel that Turkey actually acts as a Western agent. Government-run newspapers in Iran constantly write about the rise of Islamism in Turkey, its subservience to the West in general and the U.S. in particular, and express concern over Turkey's military buildup.[159] The Iranian government's neorealist approach to foreign policy, however, has deemed it more productive to promote neighborly relations with Turkey vice escalating hostilities.[160]

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[157] Larrabee, F. Stephen. *U.S. and European Policy Toward Turkey and the Caspian Basin (*Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1998), 12.

[158] Ibid., 12

[159] Pahlavan, 79.

[160] Ibid., 79. In so doing, Iran's Foreign Ministry pointed out that Iran's total weapons imports in 1989-91 were on the order of $2.8 billion, while Iraq and Saudi Arabia had imported weapons worth $10.3 and $10.6 billion, respectively. Also, that Iranian weapons imports in 1992 amounted to $850 million.

To be sure, the Iranian revolution of 1979 made the Iranian-Turkish relationship even tenser and, at times, more turbulent. Ankara joined its neighbors in great apprehension and concern due to the ambiguity of Iran's policies in the 1980s. But while the Arab states of the Persian Gulf felt threatened by the Islamic Revolution and its advocacy of political Islam, Ankara felt rather secure from the effects of this new polity in the early 1980s.[161] The Turkish secular elite appeared to be confident that the state institutions and Kemalist traditions were strong enough to withstand the tide of Islamic resurgence. The confidence of the elite came also from the fact that the sharp edge of the Ayatollah Khomeini's call to Muslims to rise and free them from Western political and cultural domination primarily aimed at the monarchies of the Persian Gulf rather than Turkey.

It could also be that he and his revolutionary aides had concluded that the Gulf rulers who claimed to be the upholders of Islamic principles and the *Sharia* were more vulnerable than Turkey to Khomeini's call. After all, Turkey had become a secular state nearly a century before and many on the Anatolia Peninsula regarded themselves more European than Middle Eastern, despite their Muslim heritage. Moreover, at the time of the Iranian Revolution, Turkey, unlike the Gulf States, was a member of NATO and therefore better shielded against outside intervention or political pressure.[162]

Despite the absence of outright confrontation between Tehran and Ankara in the 1980s and early 1990s, their relations remained strained, although both countries were members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), [163] formed in 1985. The Turks, for example, accused Iran over the years of assisting and/or providing shelter to the PKK and even of carrying out terrorist activities on Turkish soil.[164] The Iranians, for

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[161] Fuller, Graham E. "The Impact of Central Asia on the 'New Middle East'," in Menashri, David, editor. *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 213.

[162] Lesser, 7.

[163] The ECO's seat is in Tehran and the founding charter was signed in Islamabad on 28 November 1992. The ECO includes Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, plus the five Central Asian republics.

[164] Tarock (1999), 158. Some Turkish officials accused the Iranian government of involvement in the assassination of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party leader who was in Turkey in January 1994.

their part, claimed that the Turks harbored and aided Iranian opposition groups that were operating from a base in Turkish territory.[165] Additionally, Tehran has maintained that Turkey is a willing partner in Washington's anti-Iranian policy in Central Asia and that the recent military agreement between Israel and Turkey has created serious security implications for Iran—with Israeli strike aircraft potentially able to reach Iranian territory without having to cross a hostile border.

Turkey and Iran are regional powers with both mutual and competing interests. As was the case with Azerbaijan, Iranian policy decisions vis-à-vis Turkey reflect the pragmatic needs of the Iranian regime. Several case studies of Iranian-Turkish relations support this assertion. I will concentrate on these relations as they concern the Iranian policies in Central Asia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea Basin, and the Kurds—all of varied importance to Turkey as well.

B. CENTRAL ASIA: IRAN, TURKEY AND THE NEW "GREAT GAME"

Iran's policy toward Central Asia has been a rather disappointing one. Iran never matched the U.S. or even the Turks in terms of economic influence there. The U.S. boycott is not the only reason—Tehran has been late to recognize the newly independent states of the former USSR and to acknowledge their strong sense of nationalism.[166] Despite hopes for more cordial dealings, relations have remained very cold for Iran with Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and distant with Kazakhstan.[167] The strongest of these ties were with Turkmenistan and Armenia, two close friends of the United States.

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[165] Ibid., 162.

[166] Hyman, Anthony, "Central Asia and the Middle East: The Emerging Links," in Mesbahi, Mohiaddin, editor. *Central Asia and the Caucasus After the Soviet Union* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994), 47.

[167] Ibid.

The fall of the Soviet Union brought with it many concerns for Iran, not the least of which was the potential rekindling of the historical rivalry for political and economic influence between Iran and Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

> Iran's concern was that Turkey might not only attempt but succeed in reviving the old ethnic and cultural ties between it and Central Asians in order to resurrect the 'Turkish empire' or something resembling it.[168]

These concerns were only reinforced when Turkish President Sulleyman Demirel chaired a conference in Ankara, attended by several Central Asia presidents, with the objective of "strengthening and expanding cooperation between Turkey and the republics."[169] A statement issued at the end of the conference called for unity among the Turkish speaking states and, further called upon the participants "to work towards the development of democracy, economic liberalism, secularism and the separation of religion and politics."[170] It was this last item concerning the separation of politics and religion, which Tehran took as a clear reference and veiled challenge to Iran's Islamic government. Then again, in May 1997 during a visit to Turkmenistan, Demirel warned the Central Asians that Iran's hard-line fundamentalists were trying to spread their influence into the region.[171]

Tehran's core concerns continue to be ones of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and economic access. Consisting of many diverse ethnic groups, Iran becomes very sensitive when a political dispute between it and a neighboring state turns into an ethnic or nationalist conflict. Iran has been invaded by Iraq to "liberate Arabistan" (Iran's Khuzastan Province), it has been threatened with potential irredentist movements

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[168] Tarock (1997), 102.

[169] Ibid., 103.

[170] Winrow, Gareth M. "Turkey and the Newly Independent States of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2 (July 1997) on the internet at http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/1997/issue2/jv1n2a5.html [Accessed on 21 February 2000].

[171] Ibid.

instigated from Azerbaijan, and it continues to have a heated dispute with the UAE over the small islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs'. Given this historical record, one cannot blame Iran for its nervousness over Turkish rhetoric concerning Central Asia. Tehran must consider whether these Turkish statements are just rhetoric or a signal of true pan-Turanistic desires to reestablish its ancient empire.

1. Iranian Policy in Central Asia

Khomeini's original policy of *exporting* the Islamic revolution focused on the Arab countries; the enemy par excellence was the West, including Israel, and its Arab conservative allies—both for ideological reasons. Although the Iranian revolution had a strong anti-imperialist and leftist dimension, its true Islamic legitimacy extended from contesting the Islamic credentials of the Arab Muslim states, especially the Saudi Wahhabis who were very hostile to Shi'ism, but who were in control of the Holy Cities.[172]

The war against Iraq (1980-1988) gave a strategic rationale to Iranian ideological hostility toward the Sunni Arab world: Baghdad got the support of the West as well as all Arab states save Syria, whose Alawi regime was engaged in civil war against the Sunni majority. Tehran played the Islamic card to bypass the "Arab front" to undermine the legitimacy of the conservative Arab countries, as well as to be the main player in the Persian Gulf; more precisely Tehran played the *Shi'a card* with the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the High Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, the Alawi regime of Syria. Khomeini's priorities focused more to the south, in this regard, then they did toward Central Asia and Turkey. Focusing most of its resources toward the Persian Gulf, Iran chose to underplay its propaganda campaign toward Central Asia, dedicating only one radio transmitter toward Turkmen.[173] Likewise, there was apparently

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[172] Roy, Olivier. *The New Central Asia, or the Fabrication of Nations* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 56.

[173]This radio transmitter was located in Iran's northeastern Gorgan region.

no endeavor made to spread propaganda among the only Shi'a population of the Soviet Union, the Azeris. [174]

The main pillars of Islamic Iran's foreign policy collapsed between July 1988 and August 1991 after three successive blows to the regime. First, Khomeini's forced acceptance of the cease-fire with Iraq in July 1988 meant that the Ayatollah's "road to Jerusalem" could no longer "go through Kerbala." Second, the 1990-91 Gulf War revealed that Iran's foreign policy followed its national interests in true neorealist form. Tehran assured interlocutors from Riyadh that he had no intentions of joining forces with Baghdad and, for the first time, the Islamic Republic of Iran's national interests coincided in part with those of the conservative Arab states: namely, the desire for a weak, but united, Iraq.[175] This was put to the test when, in February 1991, Saddam Hussein shelled the sacred Shi'a shrine of Ali in Najaf in an attempt to force Khomeini to enter the war.[176] Despite the affront and the massacre of thousands of Shi'a pilgrims Tehran remained silent—showing that Shi'a solidarity could easily be sacrificed upon the *alter of neorealism* as Iran sat back to watch the Coalition's dismantling of Iraq's military machine.[177] The largest and final blow for Iran was the quiet collapse of the Soviet Union in August 1991, which suddenly opened a vacuum on the northern side of Iran, creating another regional imbalance and giving the hated U.S. regional, if not global, hegemony. This also meant that Washington's *existential client-state* Turkey, would gain inroads into Central Asia, where Tehran hoped to at least develop crucial economic links.

Iran's perception of embattlement and isolation continued with the launching of the Arab-Israeli peace process in 1994. Even the lasting alliance between Iran and Syria

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[174] Ibid.,57.

[175] Ibid., 59. Iran was more eager to forestall the negative consequences of an Iraqi defeat, in terms of the dismantlement of Iraq and the creation of an independent Kurdistan, than to use the circumstances to try for a breakthrough in Iraq, which would have been stalled anyway by the U.S.–Arab coalition.

[176] Milani, 119.

[177] Ibid., 120.

would have been threatened by the return of the Golan Heights to Damascus, followed by a peace treaty between the two former enemies. This sense of isolation pushed Iran to violently oppose the peace process, leading to the establishment of the U.S. "Dual Containment" policy in 1993 and the 1995 economic sanctions act.[178] In response, Iran adopted from 1995 onward a more moderate policy towards the Middle East and tacit acceptance of the status quo in the Gulf. This action went far in mending Iranian fences with the conservative Arab states, leading to the positively received Islamic Summit of December 1997 in Tehran. However, while the imposition of the status quo in the Middle East as well as in the Persian Gulf left little room for an active Iranian policy in the area. Conversely, the assertiveness of the newly independent states and the development of oil and gas production in the Caspian area obliged Iran to adopt a more creative policy toward Central Asia.[179]

2. Pan-Turanism Fears

In the 1991, glow of the Soviet Union's twilight, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel declared that his nation should be at the helm of "a Turkic-speaking world stretching from the Great Wall of China to the Adriatic."[180] Today, Demirel is president again, and his nation is increasingly establishing a renewed influence within the newly independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.[181]

Iran, ever mindful of the balance of power and its effects on Iranian security, looks upon statements like this with both ire and suspicion. Tehran has noted that there are Pan-Turanist groupings in Turkey that dream of a Turkish Empire, or at least some form of association or cultural union embracing the Turkic states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Alparslan Turkes, head of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) has been one

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[178] Roy (1999), 77.

[179] Ibid., 77.

[180] Pahlavan, 79.

[181] STRATFOR. "Turkey's Diplomacy: A Double-Edged Sword," (15 December 1999) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/meaf/specialreports/special29.htm [Accessed on 21 February 2000].

of the most active Pan-Turkists in Turkey though in his later years Turkes has considerably mellowed. It was still a surprise when then Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel included Turkes in his entourage on an official tour of Central Asia in early 1992.[182] Turkes has advocated a Turkic Commonwealth led by a High Council of Turkic Republics and the organization in Turkey of four Turkic States and Communities Assemblies sponsored by the Turkic States and Communities Friendship, Brotherhood and Cooperation Foundation (TUDEV).[183]

In addition to delegations from northern Cyprus, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, these Pan-Turkish gatherings included Turkic representatives from various Russian republics including Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia. Although these meetings were unofficial and not sanctioned by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prominent Turkish politicians including Ozal, Demirel and Ciller felt the need to attend and address them. Bodies based in Turkey such as the Research Foundation of the Turkish World, the Turkish Cultural Research Association and the Turkish Clubs Association also have Pan-Turkist sympathies.[184]

These events have given Tehran concern. Furthermore, on 12 December 1999, Turkey and Kyrgyzstan reached a five-year agreement wherein Turkey was ready to forgive Kyrgyzstan's $2.5 million debt and would provide limited military aid to the Central Asian nation. Meanwhile, Turkey's relations with Turkmenistan appear strong as well, based primarily on economic ties. At the heart of the relationship is a possible extension of the proposed Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which could transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey.[185] Meanwhile, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakstan have less developed relations with Turkey, which Turkish propaganda attempts have not helped. Ankara's "excessive emphasis on commonalities" between the people of Turkey and the

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[182] Olson (1998).

[183] Roy (1999), 98.

[184] Ibid., 99.

[185] STRATFOR. "Turkey's Diplomacy: A Double-Edged Sword," Internet.

Turic-states, has only caused varying levels of resentment in Central Asia.[186] This is to Iran's advantage and is indicative of why they chose a policy, which was more subdued and nuanced, downplaying religious dogma and replacing it with economic enticements. Yet, Iran's legacy of the 1980s continues to haunt its ability to have its neorealist policy shift embraced by these new republics.

3. Limits of Iranian Policy in Central Asia

Despite formal speeches about the "common cultural heritage" of Islam and Persia, the problem for Iran after 1991 has been the lack of both expertise and leverage in Central Asia.[187] The "Shi'itization" of Iran in the 16th century created a real cultural border with the countries where Persian was the language of culture but which remained Sunni—Afghanistan, Northern India, and Central Asia.[188] Likewise, the bulk of the Central Asian Muslims are Sunni Hanafi, and their historical connections were with the Indian subcontinent, or, to a lesser extent, with the Volga Tatars, themselves closer to the Ottoman reformist movements.[189]

Iran did not use the ethnic leverage, either, for obvious reasons. Focusing on specific ethnic groups, however, could backfire in a multi-ethnic Iran. For instance, Iran would never acknowledge an ethnic solidarity with the Azeris, because it could stir up ethnic Azeri feelings in Iran. To play on ethnic identity with the Tajiks would have also antagonized the "Turks" (Uzbeks, Kyrgys, Kazakhs, etc.) who make up the bulk of the population of the newly independent Muslim states.[190] On the one hand, Iran did not

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[186] Hunter, Shireen T. *Central Asia Since Independence* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), 48.

[187] Tarock (1999), 133.

[188] Ibid., 133.

[189] Zviagelskaya, 88.

[190] Ibid. The reluctance to play on ethnicity is nevertheless a constant pattern of Islamic Iran's foreign policy: in Afghanistan for example, Iran never built a special relationship with the only "Persian" party, the Jamiat-i Islami of B. Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masud; instead it stuck to the Shi'a parties and desperately tried to find a Pashtun connection based on ideological proximity.

make the same blunder as the Turks, who considered all Central Asians to be "ethnic brothers." On the other hand, by allowing itself to consider that the countries in Central Asia *lacked* a genuine culture and history, Tehran sorely underestimated national feelings resident in these people.

Lastly, a regularly mentioned connection, beyond Islam and ethnicity, is that of a "common cultural heritage."[191] However, neither the Iranians nor the Central Asian republics acknowledged the real basis for a common cultural ground: the Turko-Persian synthesis, where a Sunni-Persian culture has profoundly penetrated the Turkic languages and societies, and conversely where population from Iranian stock has been linguistically Turkicized. Such a concept runs counter to the new nationalism, based on ethnicity and national languages.[192] Uzbekistan looks on Tamerlan as the true "Uzbek" and is not interested in acknowledging the Persian side of the "Timurid" culture. For most of the Iranians, on the other hand, the Iranian identity is a synthesis not so much between Islam and their sense of Persian identity as there is between this identity and Shi'ism. The Tajiks particularly felt this ambivalence in the relations between Shi'ism and the Persian-identity when they tried to emphasize their cultural proximity with Iran by posing as the forerunners of Persian identity, and not as followers of the modern Iranian Shi'a culture.[193] Tehran, uneasy with the ethnic and cultural links, regularly underlines the linguistic tie, that is the use of Persian, contrary to its counterpart in Baku. However, very little has been done to give a political dimension to this low-profile linguistic solidarity.[194]

There is a general distrust toward Iran in the different Central Asian republics, where all of them are asserting secularism and fear Islamic militancy. Iran's attitude of

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[191] Pahlavan, 83.

[192] Ibid., 83.

[193] Fuller (1998), 12; and Pahlavan, 84.

[194] Ibid., 12.

superiority does little to alleviate these misgivings. Iran regularly presents itself as a kind of elder brother who can teach lessons to the young countries in terms of strategy, Islam, culture, and even language in the case of the Tajiks. There are also obvious limits to the Iranian economic influence. Despite Iranian economic goals in the region, if trans-border trade is flourishing with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, the overall picture of economic cooperation does not favor Iran.[195] To improve its overall cooperation with Central Asia, Iran is relying on the ECO; however, this organization is a forum for discussion and has not achieved much in terms of cooperation to date.

Iran's policy toward Central Asia has evolved from a conservative and cautious attitude towards the newly independent states to a more assertive policy based on the role it would like to play in providing landlocked countries with gas and oil. The main aim of Iranian foreign policy has been to prevent the United States and its Turkish and Saudi (on the religious field) allies to fill the vacuum left by the fall of the Soviet Union, effectively isolating Iran. Likewise, Iran has avoided playing the Islamic card in Central Asia because of its lack of Islamic leverage.[196] A last reason, and a consequence of the latter, is that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with little or no interference from the other revolutionary institutions such as *Pasdaran*, the Office of Islamic Propaganda, or the different secret services shapes Iranian foreign policy concerning Central Asia.[197] This is an indication of Iranian neorealist behavior in regards to Central Asia.

For example, Iran gave support to the Tajik Islamic Revolutionary Party (IRP) in 1992 and provided asylum in Tehran to some of its leaders, such as Qazi Akbar Turajanzade. Many militants of the IRP utilized Iranian-type slogans, dress, and revolutionary rhetoric during the civil war of 1992; however, once in exile, it appeared that most of the militants went to Pakistan and Afghanistan, supported by Pakistan-based

[195] In Turkmenistan, for example, where official trade cooperation is working well, Iran makes only 0.6 percent of the non-CIS foreign imports.

[196] This holds true with the exception of Tajikistan and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan.

[197] Tarock (1999), 94.

Sunni movements, including Arab militants.[198] In fact, Tehran uses double standards easily as long as it furthers its national interest. Absolute pragmatism might go along with strong ideologically worded statements. Another good example of Iranian neorealism as it pertains to this region is the opportunistic reference to the Israeli role. One one hand, Tehran vehemently condemns the close relations between Israel and Azerbaijan, while, on the other hand, it keeps silent about the huge Israeli influence in Turkmenistan, where Iranian NIOC has partial ownership of a plant in which the Israeli society Mehrav owns the lion's share.[199]

4. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan

Another good example of Iranian neorealist and policy tactics to balance against Turkish initiatives and the potential of pan-Turanism has been Tehran's courtship with Turmenistan. Shaped by an absolute pragmatism, Iran's relations with Turkmenistan revolve around economic cooperation. For example, Iran seems undeterred in its pursuit of amicable relations with Turkmenistan, despite its official secular government[200] and its development projects with Israeli and Turkish companies, which play an important role in the economy.[201]

Nevertheless, Iran has sought out and made numerous deals and agreements with Turkmenistan for pure economic necessity while balancing against the threatening influence of Turkey. On 25 May 1994, Nyazov and Rafsanjani met in Mashhad and initiated cooperation centered on "dis-enclavement" through Iran. A succession of agreements for economic, travel, and cultural exchanges followed.[202] Although Tehran

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[198] Roy (1999), 34.

[199] Ibid.

[200] The Turkmenistani constitution officially states that the country is "secular".

[201] Tarock (1999), 123.

[202] Ibid. They met again on August 22 in Tehran and on October 26 in Ashkhabad; then on 4 July 1995, January 1996, July 1996, February 1997, and July 1998—all in Tehran. A cooperation agreement regarding banking, customs, and transportation was signed in January 1995. In June 1995 a deal was

has no hope of finding much more leverage in a country so historically opposed to Iran, Tehran appears to be happy to have a small in-road for pragmatic economic cooperation. In tandem with these efforts, Iranian policy makers sough to engage at what ever level they could to counter Turkey's policy maneuvers wherever possible. Uzbekistan has very cool relations with Iran due to their concern for Tehran's potential involvement in Islamist and nationalist movements.[203] Likewise, in Kazakhstan relations are equally as distant and based mostly on a number of trade and transportation agreements from January 1996 and July 1997.[204]

Of all these states, Tajikistan presents the only real opportunity for Iran to establish a foothold in Central Asia, through a strong Islamist movement there that advocated both Persian and Islamic identity. The Iranians rapidly acknowledged the local nature of political alignments in Tajikistan, the neo-communists coming from the Kulab province and the Islamists originating in the Gharm valley. Although cold, the relations with the government of President Imamali Rahmanov never ceased. In July 1995, Rahmanov paid an official visit to Tehran, followed again by a series of cooperation agreements in various fields. At the same time, the alignments in Tajikistan ceased to be ideological and became increasingly ethnically oriented, to the dismay of Tashkent. After the fall of Kabul in September 1996, Masud established working relations with Rahmanov, stockpiling Russian ammunitions in the Kulab airfield for Masud. The Tajik opposition in Afghanistan, headed by Mollah Nuri, chose Masud's side and not the Taliban. Masud worked as a peace broker between Nuri and Rahmanov. Nuri, based in Afghanistan, came back to Dushanbe in September, while Akbar Turajanzade stood in Tehran.[205] Competition between both men complicated the

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announced to build a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran. In August 1995 a trade agreement was signed between Iran, Turkmenistan, and Armenia. Northern Iran has been provided with Turkmen gas since December 1997.

[203] Roy (1999), Internet.

[204] Tarock (1997), 99.

[205] Ibid., 100.

situation, while armed groups, acting on their own cast a shadow on the peace process. Finally, Turajanzade left Tehran, under Iranian pressure, to join the coalition government as Deputy Prime Minister in April 1998.[206]

C. INTRIGUES AND COUNTER-INTRIGUES: AZERBAIJAN THROUGH A TURKISH LENS

The preceding chapter on Iran-Azerbaijan relations dealt specifically with the relations of these two nations in presenting evidence to support my neorealist argument. The following section will discuss some of the same situations again, however they will be examined on how they influenced relations between Iran and Turkey. So as not to belabor the reader with the details again, I have condensed my analysis to some key observations.

Events in Azerbaijan in the 1990s complicated Iranian-Turkish relations. For both countries, the central issues revolved around questions of identity and nationality,[207] but the tense dynamics of the relationship derive in large part from the fluidity and volatility of post-Soviet Azerbaijani politics. Iran professes itself a multi-ethnic Islamic society, but there are strict limits on the degree of autonomy allowed to its minority nationalities. With an Azerbaijani population variously reckoned at between 10 to 20 million, mostly living in the northwestern Iran adjacent to the Azerbaijan Republic border, all Tehran governments are concerned about irredentist Azerbaijani nationalism. In 1994, there were anti-government riots in Tabriz, as in many other Iranian cities; however, the grievances seem to have been socio-economic and cultural rather than nationalist.[208] Iranian-Azeri have a distinct and more Iranian sense of identity than their northern cousins, and there can be no doubt that 70 years of Soviet rule have left

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[206] A letter of understanding on defense cooperation was signed in Tehran on December 29, 1997, the only one between Iran and any former Soviet republic. It is nevertheless clear that Iran is keeping a low profile in Dushanbe.

[207] Fuller (1990), 172-6.

[208] For example, the frustrations experienced by Iranian society over the draconian Islamic social restrictions.

significant differences in outlook and aspiration between them.[209] Moreover, Azerbaijan has its own minorities—among them the Talesh, an Iranian people concentrated near the border with Iran. It is worth noting that the short-lived 1993 Talesh separatist movement attracted little popular support and received absolutely no backing from Tehran.[210] Although the historical, cultural, and political debates surrounding the issue of Azerbaijani identity cannot be explored here in depth, the central arguments can be given in broad outline. Most Iranians consider that their Azeri fellow-citizens are, and for centuries have been, fully accepted as part of the populations of Iran. By and large no *Balkanizing* attitudes exist. In fact, many Iranians point to the thorough integration of Azerbaijanis into society—including within national elite circles—and their great contribution to Iran's modern history and culture as being inclusive. Many Iranian-Azeris, if they have any reunification feelings at all, believe that the new Azerbaijan Republic should rejoin Iran, seeing them as stolen away in the 19th century by imperialist Russia.[211]

1. Iran's View of the Threat of Azerbaijan

The majority of the ethnic-Azeri nation is resident in northern Iran, not in the Caucasian republic as opposed to Azerbaijan itself.[212] The upsurge in Azeri nationalism and border violations in the late-Soviet period became a source of considerable anxiety to the Iranian regime. Likewise, the rise of the APF and Azerbaijan's determinedly pro-Turkish position immediately after independence caused Tehran concern. For its part, Ankara sought both a courtship with the potentially oil-wealthy Azerbaijan for economic advantage and to balance power against Armenia, Russia, and Iran. Tehran perceived Turkey's support to Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis as a potential threat to its northern border. Likewise, Elchibey's outspoken anti-Iranian rhetoric and overtures to Ankara validated the Iranian perception that Turkey was making strategy political

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[209] Porkhomovsky, 1-30.

[210] O'Balance, 145; and Herzig, 26.

[211] Coppetiers, 10.

[212] Karasik, 38.

maneuvers, which would ultimately be to Tehran's long-tern detriment. [213] Iranian anxiety was finally assuaged when Heydar Aliyev, the leader of Nakhichevan, came to power on the back of Suret Huseinov's coup in 1993.[214] In the past Aliyev has also made remarks that would alarm Tehran, [215] but as the President of the Azerbaijan Republic he has seen Azerbaijan's best interest in maintaining balanced relations with Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Befitting its pragmatic outlook on policy, Tehran responded by offering Aliyev full support during the crises of September 1994 and March 1995. In spite of this, there remain many obstacles in the relationship. For example, Aliyev's ready acceptance of Washington's rejection of Iranian participation in an Azerbaijani oil consortium angered Tehran. In retaliation, Iran blocked the export of a range of goods and demanded that Azerbaijan start paying for Iranian electricity supplies to Nakhichevan.[216]

2. Iran's Perception of the Growing Pan-Turanic Threat

The Elchibey government in 1992 and the nationalist APF heightened Iran's perception of a growing threat to its security from the perspective of its indigenous Azeri population in the north and its balance of power with Turkey. These irredentist and pan-Turkist attitudes were a direct threat to Iran. When Elchibey came to power in June 1992, he turned Azerbaijan increasingly towards Turkey, as well as Egypt and Israel. [217] This supports the thesis argument for Iran's neorealist pragmatism centered on the integrity and security of the state. Iran follows a neorealist approach, which should be readily recognizable to Western analysts. In this case, Iran sought a balance of power situation between the Christian Armenian and the pro-Turkish Azeribaijani camps.

Apart from the Islamic dimension of Turkic nationalism, such a concept would have national security implications for Iran. Elchibey was anti-Iranian, pan-Azeri, and

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[213] Sajjadpour, 203.

[214] Ibid., 204.

[215] Zviagelskaya, 144.

[216] Herzig, 28; and "CENTCOM and Middle East Flashpoints: Caspian Sea Region," Internet.

[217] Herzig, 28.

turned Azerbaijan towards Turkey. He thought of Iran, as he thought of Russia, as a foreign power with expansionist policies in the region, policies that run counter to Azerbaijan's national interests. On several occasions, he reportedly blasted Iran as a doomed state and predicted the reunification of the "Azeri nation." Elchibey further antagonized Russia when he took Azerbaijan out of the CIS,[218] a move that resulted in Moscow's increasing support of Armenia. Inadvertently or not, the Elchibey government lost the support of both Iran and Russia. His government was short lived, overthrown in a military coup in June 1993, allegedly encouraged by Iran. However, a more reasonable explanation would be that the coup was the consequence of his government's failure to effectively manage the Karabakh War, as well as Russia's support of Armenia.[219]

In sum, Tehran was power balancing throughout this crisis and ongoing regional competition for influence and favor concerning oil concessions in the Caspian Sea basin. Ideologically, secular Turkey and Islamist Iran are polar opposites. Naturally, each sees the other as an unwelcome example and source of inspiration to subversives within its own society. Iran generally sees Turkey as a pro-U.S., and now pro-Israeli, regional rival of growing strength—in short, as an agent and potential launching pad for its enemies. The field of Turkish-Iranian rivalry has widened considerably in recent years, now encompassing northern Iraq, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In northern Iraq, Turkey cooperates closely with Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, while Iran generally supports Barzani's rival, Jalal Talabani. In the Caucasus, Turkey firmly backs Azerbaijan in its dispute with Armenia, while Iran tilts heavily toward Armenia—both seeking to power balance against the other. Likewise, both Turkey and Iran hope to be the site of the main export pipeline for Caspian Sea energy. Iran's tensions have also been exacerbated by Turkey's challenge for influence in Central Asia, closer Turkish and Israeli ties,[220] and suspected Turkish support of anti-Iranian groups like the Mujahedin-e Khalq.[221]

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[218] Commonwealth of Independent States.

[219] Tarock (1999), 135.

[220] Makovsky, Internet. The Iranians particularly object to a 1996 Turkish-Israeli military cooperation agreement that allows Israeli jets to exercise in Turkish airspace four times a year. Iran's concerns that Turkey has brought the once-distant Israeli enemy to the edge of the Iranian border exacerbated by

Thus, Iran had to balance against Turkey, which also shared a border with one of the combatants.[222] However, externally Iran had two very important advantages over Turkey insofar as the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was concerned. First, Turkey has no border with Azerbaijan, depending upon land routes through either Iran or Armenia for travel and commerce. Second, due to the historical hostility between the Turks and Armenians, the route to Azerbaijan through Armenia was closed and, more importantly, because of this animosity Ankara was in no position to gain favor acting as a mediator between the two warring nations.[223]

Additionally, Iran did not—and does not—want the Azeris to win the war, as it would enhance Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan. Such a development could have the potential of turning Azerbaijan against Iran, if at some point relations between Tehran and Ankara reach a crisis point. Moreover, Iran would like to keep Turkey from gaining such leverage considering the very close relationship that exists between Turkey and the US. America is a nation Iran considers hostile to its sovereignty and considers both Israel and Turkey puppets of US foreign policy in the Middle East. Therefore, Iran became very wary with the announcement of a military agreement signed between Ankara and Tel Aviv in February 1996.[224] The existence of a large Azeri minority in Iran naturally put pressure on the government to side unreservedly with the Azeri Shi'ites in the republic against the Christian Armenians. The Iranian leadership, however, did not and

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numerous press reports suggesting that Turkey and Israel are cooperating in intelligence-gathering against Iran.

[221] Ibid. Tehran also suspects Turkey of subversion. It accuses Ankara of giving refuge to members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, opponents of the Iranian regime. (This is not quite the mirror-image of Turkey's accusations about Iranian support for the PKK, as Iran does not claim that the group uses Turkish territory to attack Iran.) Tehran also probably worries that Ankara seeks to subvert the Islamic Republic's large Turkic-language-speaking Azeri minority, which constitutes some one-fourth of Iran's population.

[222] Piccoli, 21.

[223] Hale, 155.

[224] Makovsky, Internet.

does not view the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia through a religious ideological lens. As pointed out earlier, Iran's ties with the Caucasians go back centuries. Likewise, there was in Iran a feeling that Azerbaijan's victory would create a refugee problem for Iran, as the country was still under the social and financial burden of sheltering some two and a half million Afghani and Iraqi refugees who fled to Iran from their war-torn countries.[225]

D. THE KURDISH QUESTION IN IRANIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

Finally, we will examine the role of the so-called "Kurdish Question" in Iranian-Turkish relations.[226] Soon after the Islamic Revolution, Iranian Kurdistan became the center of opposition to the Khomeini's Islamic government. The Islamic revolution provided an excellent opportunity for Kurdish nationalism. The Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), founded in 1945, became the center for political expression of the Kurdish people in Iran.[227] Having fought against the Shah, this group soon found the need to posture against Tehran when Khomeini usurped the democratic expectations of the 1979 revolution.[228] Their continued threatening of separatism, coupled with the tensions of the Iran-Iraq War, provided ready grist for the fears of the leadership in Iran over territorial integrity. Likewise, Turkey shares Iran's concern with separatism as it concerns the Kurds.[229] Also exacerbating Turkish concerns was the existence of past treaties, such as the 1920 Sevres Treaty, that called its territorial integrity into question[230]

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[225] Cornell (1999), Internet.

[226] Olson, Robert. *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations from World War I to 1998* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1998): 78; and Olson, Robert. "The Kurdish Question Four Years On: The Policies of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq," *Middle East Policy* (Fall 1993), 141.

[227] Koohi-Kamali, Fereshteh, "The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan," in Kreyenbroek, Phiulip G. and Sperl, Stefan, editors. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), 180; and Entessar, Nader *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 29-30.

[228] Koohi-Kamali, 189.

[229] Pahlavan, 79.

[230] Feroz, Ahmad. *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 48; and Entessar (1992), 51-3.

and the deadly challenge the PKK insurgency present to Ankara. Therefore, the Kurdish situation provided both Iran and Turkey with ready levers to use against each other in different ways over the last few decades—each demonstrated neorealism in their approach to the Kurds. With respect to Iran, the following case study discussion will aptly illustrate Iran's neorealist base in international relations policy. Tehran used factions within the Kurdish population to balance power against other Kurdish factions, as well as Iraq and Turkey. Then, when the potential reality of a Kurdish state began to form following the Gulf War, Iran changed its tactics and allied itself with Turkey to destroy any chances of this occurring. The motivation was similar to other situations examined already—the danger of ethnic-irredentism and the impacts on Iranian internal security.

The first known use of the name Kurdistan dates from the time of the last great Seljuk Sultan of Persia, Sultan Sandjar, circa 1157, which created the first Kurdish administrative province. This province, to the northwest of Hamadan, encompassed the whole of the area between Azerbaijan and Luristan, including the regions of Hamadan, Dinawar, Kermanshah, and Sennah to the east of the Zagros Mountains and to the west of Shahrezur and Khuftiyan, on the Zab River.[231] However, the Kurds, being a mountain, pastoral people have always been ambivalent to borders and boundaries, traveling where the pastures best support their herds.[232] One commonality that has remained with the Kurds since ancient days is the fact that they have largely been under the control of one empire or another to this day.[233]

In the past within Iran, the Kurds have played a substantial role—in fact, Iran was even ruled by a Kurdish dynasty, the Zands (1792-95). But since that short time, the

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[231] O'Shea, Maria T. "The Question of Kurdistan and Iran's International Borders," in McLachlan, Keith, editor. *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 51.

[232] Tapper, Richard. "Nomads and Commissars on the Frontier of Eastern Azerbaijan," in McLachlan, Keith, editor. *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 24; and Ganji, M. H. "The Historical Development of the Boundaries of Azerbaijan," in McLachlan, Keith, editor. *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 41.

[233] O'Shea, 51.

Kurds have been marginalized in Iranian polity, be it a monarchy, military dictatorship, or Islamic democracy.[234] The one plus for Iran has been that the Iranian Kurds, like many other ethnic groups in Iran, identify themselves as Iranians as well as Kurd with no inherent contradiction.[235] "No Kurdish political party has failed to declare its attachment to the territorial integrity of Iran. It is clear that the Iranian Kurds have never been radical separatists."[236] But this attitude began to change in the late 20th century. This occurred, in part, due to the regional conflicts (in Iran and Iraq, Iran and Turkey, Iraq and Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan), which hampered cross border movement. Second is the realization that Kurdish patience and moderation has paid low dividends and that perhaps the time was ripe to gain autonomy.[237] It is this factor, the potential of a separatists Kurdistan, coupled with its relations with Turkey, which most motivated Tehran's policy behavior since 1980.

Turkey had already experienced and forcibly squelched Kurdish insurgent activity during the 1970s; however, the Kurds recovered and intensified with successive waves of guerrilla activity along the Turk-Iraqi border after November 1983.[238] Ankara became concerned that Baghdad was no longer able to control its Kurdish population in the north and that the KDP and/or the PUK would cooperate with the PKK which had established guerrilla camps in the mountainous border area from which it conducted its forays into Turkey.[239] From this growing concern, Turkey's military penetrated Iraq's border up to 25 miles with 8,000-10,000 troops, attacking the PKK killing and capturing several hundred with the tacit approval of Saddam Hussein. This drew much consternation from

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[234] Vali, Abbas. "The Making of Kurdish Identity in Iran," *Critique* (Fall 1995), 4.

[235] Entessar, (1992), 54.

[236] O'Shea, 55.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Barkey, Henri J. "Under the Gun: Turkish Foreign Policy and the Kurdish Question," in Olson, Robert, editor. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s (*Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 73; and Pahlavan, 87.

[239] Olson (1998), 30.

the leadership in Tehran who were convinced Turkey was preparing itself for the eventual seizure of Iraq's northern oilfields.

Iraq had no love lost for the troublesome Kurds and, with its primary focus on winning its war with Iran, Baghdad concluded the agreement introduced by Turkey allowing *hot pursuit* operations into either sides' territory against the Kurdish insurgents.[240]

> When Baghdad acquiesced to Turkey's demands for a "hot-pursuit" treaty in October 1984, Tehran refused a similar request...The Iranians agreed, however, to a "security agreement" on 28 November 1984 requiring "each country to prohibit any activity on its territory aimed against the other's security.[241]

1. Under the Shroud of War: Iranian Concerns with Turkish Intentions

It is not surprising Iraq would make these concessions with Turkey under the circumstances. Likewise, the Iranian responses to what it was seeing are equally logical when filtered through the neorealist lens. In 1986, although Iran rarely liked to encourage separatist groups of any type— given its own fears about the Pandora's Box it might represent—Tehran formed an alliance with both the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), led by Masoud Barazani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani.[242]

> By November 1986, these groups were receiving large quantities of arms and assistance from Iran as the Iranians intensified their military campaign along the northern front with Iraq. Several offensives in the Haj Unran area were undertaken with substantial KDP and PUK involvement.[243]

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[240] In reality, this was almost exclusively used by Turkish troops on Iraqi territory.

[241] Bolukbasi, Suha, "Turkey Copes with Revolutionary Iran," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. Xiii, no. 1 & 2 (1989), 103-4.

[242] Entessar (1992), 85. The PUK and KDP themselves had been feuding since 1975 in northern Iraq.

[243] Ibid., 86.

Iraq, in supporting its war effort was utilizing the oil pipeline it had with Turkey to avoid the threat to its shipping in the Gulf from Iran. Thus, in a peripheral way, Turkey became a consideration for Iran as well. Low-intensity guerrilla attacks by the PKK in Turkey accompanied the upsurge in military activity following the KDP-PUK-Iranian alliance in 1986.[244] This activity prompted another round of Turkish military raids of increasing intensity into northern Iraq. These actions further strained the already tense relations between Tehran and Ankara. The Iranians were bitterly critical of the Turks bombing raids on the Kurds for a few reasons. The Iranians considered the Kurds an ally in the war with Iraq but, more importantly, was Iranian perceptions of Ankara's intent.[245] After all, to Khomeini Turkey was nothing more than a puppet of the West (i.e., the US) in the Middle East. Likewise, Iran was receiving no international support although it was the victim of Iraqi aggression. However, to the anxious Iranians it was the timing of Turkey's raids launched at the very time Iran was initiating its new offensive in the Haj Umran area, which was most annoying.[246] Not to mention the Turkish harboring of other Iranian opposition groups who were operating from within Turkey—like the *Mojahedin-i Khalq* [247]

Therefore, Tehran decided it would leverage the "special interest" Turkey had with the Kurds to ensure Turkey's neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War, "tolerating" the basing of various dissident Turkish groups on Iranian territory—to include the PKK.[248] (Iran has even stirred up trouble—to a limited extent—between Turkey's Shi'ite or Alevi

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[244] Olson (1998), 30.

[245] Ibid., 31.

[246] Entessar (1992), 86.

[247] Olson, (1998), 31. By 1989, there were between one and one and a half million Iranian's in Turkey whose political activities, targeted in opposition to the Islamic Revolutionary regime in Tehran.

[248] Morad, Munir. "The Situation of Kurds in Iraq and Turkey: Current Trends and Prospects," in Kreyenbroek, Philip G. and Sperl, Stefan, editors. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), 119.

population.)[249] This policy, although risky in its own right, was effective in Tehran's eyes. The potency of Kurdish militancy and its significant effect on Turkey's internal security placed the authorities in Turkey under enormous strain. Compounding this was the fact that this new insurgency was coordinated from abroad, outside the reach and control of the Turkish security forces.[250]

Turkey was not alone in having a Kurdish insurgency group targeting the regime. Iran, too, had its Kurdish enemies whom Turkey was able to use as a counter lever to Iran. The KDPI had been a force in Iran for many years. It had fought against the Shah's regime and, when the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution did not deliver the democratic state the group expected, it went on the offensive against the Islamists, seeking Kurdish autonomy.[251] The leader of this group in the 1980s was Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou who, throughout the 1980s, refused to modify the KDPI's demands for Kurdish autonomy. Never tolerant of separatist groups in its midst, Iran's anxiety was exponentially heightened due to the grave wartime environment of these years. A year after the cease-fire, on 13 July 1989, Ghassemlou was assassinated in Vienna while meeting with representatives of the Iranian government and, although one of Iran's own diplomats was injured in the incident, suspicion of Tehran's hand in the killing was great.[252] Of course, this alliance was predictable under the framework of neorealism. Iranian territorial integrity is threatened and the leadership makes its policy decisions according to that threat.

In 1986, Turkey escalated its military campaign against the PKK with an incursion into Iraqi territory on 15 August 1986 and followed by larger operations on 3-4

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[249] Fuller, *Islamic Fundametalism in the Northern Tier Countries,* 7.

[250] Morad, 119.

[251] Green, Jerrold D. *Terrorism and Politics in Iran (*Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1995), 11.

[252] Entessar, Nader. "Kurdish Conflict in Regional Perspective," in M.E. Ahrari, eidtor, *Change and Continuity in the Middle East: Conflict Resolution and Prospects for Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 42-43.

and 27 March 1987. The then Majlis Speaker, Hashemi Rafsanjani, voiced the concerns of Iran's leadership that Turkey had designs on the north Iraq oil fields of Kirkuk, feelings which continued into the 1990s. It was this fear that Ankara would gain either direct or indirect control of these oilfields and the resulting shift in the regional balance of power that prompted Iran to make the national security decisions it made at this time.[253] Such control would move Turkey's "security border a few hundred miles south and east,"[254] which would, if allowed to occur, shift the balance of power in an unfavorable way for Iran. Moreover, these events were occurring in conjunction with a similar problem of influence vis-à-vis Azerbaijan (discussed earlier) and the new international framework of both the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War—a truly traumatic environment for the Iranian leadership. Since Turkey's preoccupation with the Kurds eclipsed all other security concerns for Ankara at the time, Tehran chose to use *its* influence with some of the factionalized Kurdish groups to counter Turkey. This action illustrates once again Iran's neorealist approach to policy decision and strategy when threats to its territorial integrity present themselves.

2. Iran's "Chameleon" Policy and the Abortion of a Kurdish State

In the aftermath of the Gulf War and Iraq's defeat, problems between Iran and Turkey were exacerbated once again by Turkey's major campaigns against the PKK in northern Iraq. These relations and the Kurdish question, however, would swing between opposition and alliance with Iranian nervousness about Turkish intentions replaced by a desire to penetrate its isolation, form better regional ties (especially economic) and seek to marginalize U.S. influence in the region. As regards Turkey, Iran policy would change like a chameleon to meet its neorealist goals.

In 1992, 1995 and 1997 Turkish military forces launched massive campaigns into northern Iraq that involved ever-growing numbers of troops: from 10,000 to 60,000

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[253] Ibid., 66.

[254] Olson (1998), 32.

men.[255] This build-up created a festering suspicion as to Turkey's true intentions. After all, from Tehran's perspective Turkey was a client state of U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, evidenced by Ankara's long alliance with the U.S. and the role it played in the prosecution of the 1990 Gulf War. Then, with the establishment of Operation *Provide Comfort,* Tehran believed its suspicions justified with the hated-U.S. gaining yet another entrée into the region and providing a potential safe-haven in Iraq for anti-Iranian opposition groups, especially the KDP-I. Therefore, Iran took action to ensure such a national security threat was preempted by attacking and bombing suspected KDP-I camps within the "no-fly zones" in Iraq throughout the spring and summer of 1993.[256]

From 1993 to 1995, Turkey was willing to use its support of the KDP-I as a lever to prevent Iran from supporting the PKK. However, according to author Robert Olson, Iranian support to the PKK camped in both Iraq and Iran was far greater than that of Ankara's aid to the KDP-I.[257] Likewise, Tehran's strategy in regard to its use of the Kurdish card was multi-faceted: (1) counter Turkish designs in northern Iraq; (2) deflect U.S./Western influence in the region; (3) counter Turkish support of Azerbaijan; and, more importantly (4) ensure an independent Kurdish state went unrealized to preempt Kurdish-Iranian irredentism.[258] In the end, it was this last concern which, between 1992 and 1998, both Turkey and Iran saw was in both their best interests to counter by managing their trans-state Kurdish issue—the pragmatic choice of neorealism.

After 1993, the Iranians and Turks met and signed a series of security protocols aimed at preventing the emergence of an independent Kurdish state, bandied about in the international media. Syria had also been a PKK supporter to Turkey's chagrin, however, Iran, through its own alliance with Syria,[259] was able to gain Damascus' support on the

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[255] Hiro, Dilip. "New Attacks On Kurds Take Turkey Deep Into Iraq," New York: *Inter Press Service* (11 November 1997), 1.

[256] Olson (1998), 41.

[257] Ibid., 41.

[258] Entessar (1996), 84.

[259] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 20.

Kurdish agreements.[260] These agreements stipulated that neither country would permit any terrorist organization to exist on its territory. Rafsanjani stated that Iran would take direct measures against known PKK camps issuing orders for any PKK member shot regardless of whether they were wearing uniforms or were merely smugglers helping support the cause.[261] Iran gave Turkey evidence of its commitment to the protocols on 4 May 1994 by turning over to Turkish security forces 28 captured PKK members, ten of which were dead.[262] A month later, on 13 June, Ankara made a request to Iran's visiting Interior Minister Mohammad Besharati, for permission for the Turkish air force to bomb PKK bases located in the areas around Mount Ararat and Mount Tendurek in and near Iranian territory.[263] Two days later Turkish press public announced that Iran had granted permission for the proposed Turkish air strikes, leaving communications open for further strikes on PKK logistical sites. In return, Turkish President Demirel announced that Turkey would move against the anti-Iranian M*ojahedin-i Khalq* based in Turkey.[264]

During the period between 1994 and 1995, Turkish-Iranian relations underwent strain due to the internecine fighting of the two main Kurdish factions in northern Iraq—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). Iran supported the PUK and Turkey the KDP to gain a level of influence in this unstable area and as a lever against each other's policies.[265] A patron-client relationship with each Kurdish faction was established and factions became more dependent upon their respective patron country. Despite denials by Iranian authorities that they are providing support to the PKK, Turkish intelligence reports believed otherwise. For instance, there

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[260] Olson (1998), 42.

[261] Hooks, Elizabeth R. *Kurdish Nationalism: American Interests and Policy Options (*Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, December 1996), 66; and Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 24.

[262] Gunter, Michael. "Mulla Mustafa Barazani and the Kurdish Rebellion in Iraq: The Intelligence Factor," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Winter 1994), 468.

[263] Olson (1998), 43.

[264] Ibid., 43.

[265] Gunter (1994), 466; and Makovsky, Internet.

are approximately 50 PKK camps in Iran, in which 1,200 terrorists are being trained every year, and transported to the Turkish border by military planes that belong to Iran.[266] In addition, Iranian officers of the *Pasdaran* likely trained PKK terrorists in these camps as well as in northern Iraq. Tehran maintains the attitude that "Tehran would continue supporting the PKK in return for more PKK terrorist activities in Turkey." [267]

This ambiguity was further aggravated when the two largest Kurdish factions, the KDP and PUK, began to each move closer to their state patrons (Turkey and Iran, respectively), threatening to draw both Ankara and Tehran into a proxy war in northern Iraq. This is when Iranian leadership decided to deploy troops. For Iran, this ran counter to its longer-term strategy of developing a relationship with Turkey, which would allow Iran to penetrate the economic constraints imposed by Washington's Dual Containment policy.[268] In the end, playing upon the neorealist desires of Ankara and its geopolitical need to contain the PKK, Tehran was able to gain Turkey's cooperation in some economic agreements of critical importance to Iran. Likewise, Turkey gained assistance in neutering the PKK and the halt of Iranian support to Islamist fundamentalist opposition groups in Turkey.[269]

For instance, the national security issues between the two countries concerning the Kurds were specifically given prominence when Demirel met with Rafsanjani in Tehran 15-17 June 1994, the first visit by a Turkish president to Iran in decades. His was a coup to Iran's master neorealist strategy discussed in the beginning of this paper to counter territorial threats and regional isolation. Relations continued to improve in 1995

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[266] "Intelligence Reports Say There are 50 PKK Camps in Iran," Turkish Daily News (9 August 1999) on the internet at http://homepages.go.com/homepages/h/e/y/heyvaheft1999/9-8-99-TDN-pkk-in-irn.html [Accessed on 3 March 2000].

[267] Ibid. Financial support: Iran has given $900,000 to the PKK from 1995-1999. And a serious point with Ankara is the reports that suggest that Iran also asks for favors from PKK terrorists in return for their support to the PKK, targeting leading figures and members of the KDP-I, and resulting in the deaths at the hands of the PKK of more than 100 members and 11 key figures.

[268] Olson (1998), 45.

[269] Ibid., 46, 49.

despite rhetoric to the contrary.[270] According to Olson, there are three major geostrategical and geopolitical imperatives requiring cooperation by Iran and Turkey for the management of the Kurdish issue. First, their mutual interests in participating in the oil and gas resources and their distributive networks. Second, the desires of each to refrain from undo interference in each other's policies in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Third, Iran and Turkey's need to agree on their respective spheres of influence in northern Iraq.[271] Turkey's concern for possible Iranian support to the PKK and Iran's concern with Turkish support to the KDP-I, even more for support to Azeri nationalists, were both payoffs and threats that each held against the other. Thus, by mid-1997 Iran and Turkey appeared to have reached a tacit understanding that each would restrain support for their client Kurdish factions to ensure the maintenance of an inter-state balance.

3. Today's Iranian-Turkish Relations: The Kurdish Issue Remains

Although this showed promise from the Iranian perspective, relations continue to find a lightning rod in regards to each countries Kurdish problems. For example, some believe that Iran in 1997 inadvertently sent mixed signals on its position regarding Turkey's campaign against the PKK in Iraq. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs was calling for the immediate withdrawal of Turkish forces from northern Iraq, citing Tehran's concern for Iraqi territorial integrity;[272] however, this rhetoric was downplayed by Rafsanjani a few days later at the D-8 Summit in Turkey, where he emphatically asserted that the interests of Turkey and Iran were intertwined and that "Turkey is our friend while the PKK is not." [273] Further, in an interview with Turkish

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[270] During the 7th Tripartite meeting in Tehran on 8 September 1995, the foreign ministers of both Iran and Syria denounced Turkeys 1995 incursion into northern Iraq that past spring as violating of a sovereign states territorial integrity and threatening the fragmentation of Iraq. However, they were just as eager to pleasantly confer with the Turks on other matters of mutual interest.

[271] Olson (1998), 38.

[272] STRATFOR. "Tehran Divided Over Turkey's War on Kurds," (18 June 1997) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/061897.asp [Accessed on 9 April 2000].

[273] Ibid.

television, Rafsanjani declined to explicitly condemn Turkey's military actions in Iraq, instead focusing on the "headaches" caused by large groups of Kurds fleeing into Iran to escape the fighting, bringing with them weapons, disease, and a host of problems.[274] However, despite Rafsanjani's statements of mutual interests, contrasting rhetoric came the next day from the fundamentalist outlets when a *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* commentary, which blasted Turkey's cooperation with Israel, stating it would likely lead to Arab retaliation against Turkey.[275] Although this was likely a product of the rising factional struggle between the Iranian moderates and fundamentalists instigated by the resignation of the Islamist proponent Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, whose policies complemented the Islamic hardliners' agenda.

Conversely, in 1998, Iran and Turkey made several agreements on dealings with the Kurds with Tehran's new engagement policy and *charm offensive*, which began in earnest that year. In March 1998, Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi met during the Islamic Conference in Doha, Qatar and agreed to take allied action against the Iraqi Kurdish group PKK—a huge gesture to Ankara on Tehran's desire to improve relations. After all, the Kurdish issue is of fundamental importance to Turkey, which is concerned with security in its own Kurdish areas. The willingness of Iran to cooperate in operations against the PKK satisfies a basic Turkish need by increasing the forces available for handling the Kurds and denying the Kurdish rebels refuge in Iran.[276] However, Tehran's motivations were not altruistic for Iran was intent on reversing the results of the Iran-Iraq war. They want to recover that portion of the Shatt al-Arab they surrendered to Baghdad at the ceasefire accords. Turkey's willingness to participate in operations against the Kurds in the north is indispensable to any plan to dismember Iraq. Iranian diplomacy has been moving in the direction of creating a regional coalition able to control Iraq without U.S. support.[277]

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[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid.

[276] STRATFOR. "Turkey and Iran Agree to Cooperate in Combating PKK," 19 March 1998) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/031998.asp [Accessed on 9 April 2000].

[277] Ibid.

Relations have begun to sour again in recent years. For example, on 18 July 1999, Iranian media reported that Turkish planes killed a number of Iranians during the bombing of suspected PKK positions in Iran.[278] On this day Iranian media broadcast a statement by the Iranian foreign ministry condemning an alleged Turkish air raid on border outposts in the mainly Kurdish inhabited Piranshahr area in Iran's Western Azerbaijan province, claiming that Iranian brigade positions were resulting in some injuries and one death.[279] The next day, the Iranian Army command issued a statement emphasizing that it had the right of "proper response" to these provocations. It also said that Iran holds Turkey responsible for the "further development of events."[280] Turkish Defense Minister Sabahattin Cakmakoglu denied the Iranian charges, saying that he had no information on the claims, and added only that his office was still collecting information on the matter, and later, on 19 July, said that the Iranian claims were simply not true.[281] Moreover, this episode prompted Turkey to raise the international relations ante by accusing Iran of continuing to shelter PKK rebels.[282] In response, of course, Tehran denied these accusations, making the counter claim that there were no PKK bases on its territory, demonstrating clearly that the Kurdish question remains a leveraging point for both countries.

E. SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter has provided specific examples illustrating Iranian neorealism in its policy decisions with Turkey. In examining the interactions of these two nations in Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and with the ethnic Kurdish factions straddling the territories of both countries, as well as Iraq, the evidence is overwhelming in

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[278] STRATFOR. "Turkey Accused of Attacking Iranian Targets," (20 July 1999) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/072099.asp [Accessed on 9 April 2000].

[279] Likewise, the governor of Western Azerbaijan province also claimed that five civilians were killed and ten were wounded.

[280] STRATFOR. "Turkey Accused of Attacking Iranian Targets," Internet.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Ibid.

supporting the neorealist argument. Iranian perceptions of threat to its territorial integrity have always predicated a pragmatic response from Tehran. Again, the close relationship Turkey has with the U.S., its secular-Muslim government, and its superior economic position relative to Iran only serve to amplify Iran's perceptions. In the case of Turkey, these perceptions are amplified by Istanbul's actions with each of the elements discussed here presented Tehran with threats on each of these levels simultaneously, prompting the pragmatic actions it took to counter Turkish power.

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VI. IRAN AND ISRAEL RELATIONS CASE STUDY

The following case study will again provide evidence to support the thesis that the international relations theory of neorealism drives Iranian national security and foreign policy. This analysis is of interest because it shows how the Islamic revolutionary government leadership was able to rationalize its dealings with its Zionist enemies in Iran when the need dictated. This Iranian policy behavior manifested itself during the Iran-Iraq War, in its vacillating support of Hezbollah in the 1990s, and in its rhetoric against the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.

A. BACKGROUND

Until the overthrow of the Shah's regime in 1979, Israel and Iran had established a degree of diplomatic relations with government missions in both countries, becoming *de facto* allies in the Western camp of the Cold War.[283] Under the Shah, from 1953 to 1979, Iran was one of Israel's primary suppliers of oil and a major commercial partner. In addition, the intelligence services of the two countries cooperated closely, and Israel exported military hardware, provided training and other assistance to Iranian military forces. The Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's joining of the anti-Israeli camp abruptly terminated these close, but discreet, relations in 1979, upon the success of the Islamic Revolution. Shortly thereafter, Iran called for the "eradication" of Israel through armed struggle and its replacement by a Palestinian state. As a symbolic gesture, Tehran gave the PLO the building of the former Israeli mission. In the 1980s, however, Israeli concern about the fate of approximately 30,000 Jews remaining in Iran, interest in assisting Iran in its war with Iraq, and cooperation with the US in its efforts to free American hostages held by Iranian-backed Shi'ite extremists in Lebanon, led to a renewal of contacts between Israeli and Iranian leaders and shipments of Israeli arms to Tehran, which—when revealed—became the Iran-Contra.[284]

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[283] However, it should be noted that this relationship was never formalized by an exchange of ambassadors.

[284] Metz, Helen Chapin. *Israel: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, United States Army, December 1988), 44-46.

Today, Middle East analysts and researchers in the West face a paradox concerning Iran. Iran has suffered greatly under the burden of US economic sanctions and its label as a "rogue state" and supporter of international terrorism. To alleviate this suffering, Western thinkers would expect the *pragmatic* Iran decision maker should seek policies to appease the West, such as withdrawing financial support to groups like Hezbollah, to remove economic sanctions, which would allow foreign investment and debt restructuring thereby creating positive results for the country and its people. However, this is not the course Iran has taken, even under the more moderate Khatami. The real question is why does Iran persist despite the economic hardship imposed on it to stop this practice? Is it out of ideology? The answer is no. Iran continues to support Islamist groups because it benefits, in some way, their desire to balance power against their perceived national security challenges—the largest being the United States. This is why Iran attempted to send armaments in December 1992 to Bosnian Muslims in breach of the UN arms embargo applying to all former-Yugoslav states.[285] Bluff or not, it energized US policy makers to decide on some measure of direct intervention. If the Iranian plan was to force our entanglement in the Balkans, they succeeded, since the original US contingency plan to enable European forces to act has blossomed into a long-term force commitment with no end in sight.

In the same vein, Ambassador Michael A. Sheehan, former Marine Corps General and Unified Commander of the former US Atlantic Forces Command, in his statement to Congress on 2 November 1999, stated:

> Iran remains a leading state sponsor of terrorism. CIA Director Tenet affirmed before Congress earlier this year that hardliners continue to view terrorism as a legitimate tool of Iranian policy, and they still control the institutions that can implement it. As noted in this year's Patterns of Global Terrorism...Iran continues to be involved in a range of terrorist activities. These include providing material support and safehaven to some of the most lethal terrorist groups in the Middle East, notably Hizballah, Hamas, and the PIJ.

[285] Parks, Michael, "Competing Visions of a Future State," *Los Angeles Times Special Edition* (6 April 1993), H5.

> Iranian assistance has taken the form of financing, equipping, offering training locations, and offering refuge from extradition. In the case of Hizballah and Hamas, Iranian support totals tens of millions of dollars in direct subsidies each year. Tehran also continues to target Iranian dissident's abroad.[286]

Ambassador Sheehan went on to add that two official Iranian government organizations, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, have "institutionalized the use of terrorism as an instrument of policy over the past two decades. These two government organs have long-standing ties to the terrorist groups I mentioned earlier, among others, and they appear determined to maintain these relationships regardless of statements to the contrary from some of Iran's political leaders."[287]

Although Iran continues to supports rejectionist groups opposed to the Arab-Israeli peace process, the Khatami administration as recently as June 1999 stated that if the Palestinians accepted the peace process and the existence of Israel, Iran would do the same.[288] But Iran's regional neighbors continue to be suspicious. Sunni rulers in the Gulf have always been jittery about Iran's authority over their sizable Shi'ite minorities. These Shi'ites trace their origin to Iran or perceive Iran as a religious center. Today Arab neighboring countries fear both Iran's military ambitions and support for radical Islamic groups.[289]

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[286] Sheehan, Internet.

[287] Ibid.

[288] Mahmood, Sohail. Political Dynamics of Contemporary Islamic Fundamentalist Movements: Comparative Case Study of Pakistan, Egypt, and Iran (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1993), 286.

[289] Kraska, James. "Iran Flexes Maritime Muscles in Gulf." *Defense News* (4 October 1993), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 20 October 1999]; and Bruce, James. "Iran's Military Build-up in Gulf Alarms GCC," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (4 December 1996), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 25 October 2000].

B. THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

The Iran-Iraq War began with Iraq's invasion of Iran's oil-rich Shatt-al-Arab region along the northeast coast of the Persian Gulf. The heavy revolutionary rhetoric of the new Islamic Republic is as much to blame for provoking Iraq's military invasion as was Saddam Huessein's greed and resource envy. It was a long and bloody conflict that was, at first, spearheaded from the Iranian side by the zealots of the *Pasdaran*.[290] Their "human wave" tactics, although initially effective in stopping Iraqi advances, cost the nation hundreds of thousands of their young men.[291] Several Western and Arab powers actively supported Iraq with sales of weapons and equipment while Iran was isolated. Although some support came from the People's Republic of China and North Korea, it did not help Iran's more crucial needs of spare parts and ammunition for its predominantly US-made inventory inherited from the deposed Shah.[292] So while the new revolutionary government was outwardly hostile to both the US and Israel, its leaders knew they ultimately needed to acquire replenishments for their US equipment if the war was a prolonged conflict. This is when the Israelis made contact with their proposal to assist in some arms sales which would later come to be known in the US as the Iran-Contra Affair and a more pragmatic Iran came out from behind it's ideological dogma.

1. Iran-Contra Affair

Following the victory of Iran's revolutionaries, Israeli officials became increasingly concerned with the both the biting rhetoric from the Ayatollah Khomeini and the status of the small, indigenous Jewish-Iranian population in the new Islamic Republic. Moreover, the Israelis were anxious to undercut Iraq, who they saw as a potential Arab adversary. It was from this direction that Israel began to seek out, through clandestine communications, a dialogue with Tehran and an offer to help them in their war effort. Contrary to the public, ideological rhetoric of the *mullahs*, Tehran demonstrated great

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[290] Karsh, 44. The *Pasdaran* are Iran's Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guards.

[291] Zabih, Sepehr. *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988), 23.

[292] Ibid.

interest—, as a true neorealist state should. Israel promised to seek the spare parts, equipment, and ammunition the besieged Iranians needed to fend off the reconstituting Iraqi military from the US.

In early July 1985, Israel presented to the US government the first of three consecutive requests regarding American-Iranian relations, submitted to National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane by David Kimche, director of Israel's Foreign Ministry.[293] "Kimche informed him that Iranian officials had conveyed to Israel their interest in a discourse with the US and that, to prove their *bona fides*, they were willing to influence the Hezbollah in Lebanon to release American hostages in Beirut."[294] McFarlane also found that the Iranians would expect some benefits for themselves from such dialogue, probably in the form of weapons. A second Israeli request arrived in mid-July by Premier Peres through his consultant and special emissary, Adolph Schwimmer, who was an international arms dealer.[295] It was here that "the hook" was presented to President Reagan's National Security team. "Schwimmer informed McFarlane of a recent contact with the Iranians through another go-between, Manuchehr Ghorbanifar (an Iranian arms merchant), who had been told that Iran could obtain the release of the seven Americans captured in Lebanon in exchange for 100 Tube Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire Guided (TOW) missiles from Israel."[296]

McFarlane knew that Reagan was anxious to find some way of gaining the freedom of American hostages in Lebanon and promptly cabled Secretary of State

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[293] A transcript can be found in Vitas, Robert A. and Williams, John Allen, editors. *U.S. National Security Policy and Strategy, 1987-1994: Documents and Policy Proposals* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996).

[294] Segev, Samuel. *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair*, translated by Haim Watzman (New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1988), 83; and Hunter, Shireen T. "Iran and the Arab World," in Miron Rezun, editor, *Iran at the Crossroads* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 102-104.

[295] Lenczowski, 236; and Quandt, William B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington: D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1993), 357-8.

[296] Segev, 125-7. The TOW missile, first fielded by the US in 1970, is used to engage and destroy enemy armored vehicles, primarily tanks. Secondary mission is to destroy other point targets such as non-armored vehicles, crew-served weapons and launchers.

Schultz (then on a trip in Asia) telling him of this proposal.[297] In response, Shultz consented to "a tentative show of interest without commitment" from the US to the Israelis and Iranians.[298] Both McFarlane and Donald Regan, White House chief of staff, later testified that the President encouraged them to "go ahead" and "open it up."[299] A third Israeli request arrived on 3 August 1985, when Kimche again visited McFarlane in Washington. Israel's proposal was essentially a repetition of the earlier request for an exchange of 100 TOWS for the seven hostages, but with a plea that the US agree to replace the missiles thus sold by Israel to Iran. McFarlane discussed this proposal with Reagan and the members of the National Security Council (NSC).[300]

Although Shultz and Weinberger opposed the idea of an arms-for-hostages swap, President Reagan gave his approval for the deal, provided that: (1) only modest amounts of arms would be transferred to Iran; (2) the arms would not drastically change the military balance; and (3) the arms would not include major weapons systems.[301] Furthermore, President Reagan—undoubtedly with the backdrop of the Cold War in mind—also indicated he wanted Tehran to know of US desires for a renewed political relationship. Author Samuel Segev indicates: "On 30 August 1985, Israel transferred 100 TOWS to Iran,[302] followed by a delivery of another 408 TOWS on September 14, 1985.

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[297] President Reagan, who was in the hospital recuperating from cancer surgery, was also informed.

[298] Wroe, Ann. Lives, Lies & the Iran-Contra Affair (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 1992), 94.

[299] From the *Tower Commission Report* cited in Lenczowski, 237.

[300] Walsh, Lawrence E. *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-up (*New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 202-205.

[301] Simpson, Christopher. *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 185-7, 198; and Segev, 155. Despite this stipulation it is allegedly true that some HAWK surface-to-air missiles and system spare pasts were included in these sales from the Israelis (who took them from their own inventories and then requested replacements from the US). What continues to remain clouded is whether Reagan and his team approved these weapons. My opinion is that they were not and were left holding the bag by the Israelis.

[302] Segev, 85.

A day later, Reverend Benjamin Weir, the first of the hostages, was freed by his captors."[303]

It was not until 3 November 1986, that news of the arms dealing between the US, Israel, and Iran got out by way of the Lebanese weekly *As Shiraa.*[304] Rafsanjani, then Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, scrambled to preempt domestic fallout from the revelation by arguing that Iran's war effort against Iraq demanded weapons from any source.[305] Although popular response was extremely negative—citing that the needs of the state should never transcend the principles of Islam—Khomeini, as the *faqih*, both knew of and sanctioned contact with the US and Israel.[306] Likewise, he never silenced Rafsanjani's repeated offers to assist in gaining the release of American hostages in Beirut. In neorealist fashion, both Khomeini and Rafsanjani understood that state survival and potential victory required these weapons. What is most significant about these series of events as they relate to this discussion, however, is not the weapons themselves or the ramifications the affair had on US domestic politics when the deal was revealed, but rather, it was the stark fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran and its Supreme Spiritual Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, agreed to do business with the *Zionist entity* and the *Great Satan*.[307] It stands as the epitome of the neorealist argument.

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[303] Lencowski, 236-7.

[304] Mackey, Sandra. *The Iranian: Persia, Islam and the Soul of A Nation.* (New York: Plume of Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1996), 326. Mackey states that in all probability, the story was fed to *As Shira* by Iranian hard-liners interested in torpedoing relations between Iran and the United States to derail the popular Rafsanjani's power base.

[305] Sojoodi, Eman. "President Hashemi Rafsanjani (Iran)," (University of Texas, March 2000) on the internet at http://www.la.utexas.edu/course-materials/government/chenry/mena/ roles/aip/profiles96/ 0013.html [Accessed on 10 November 1999].

[306] Mackey, 326-27.

[307] Equally remarkable, the US government opened a secret channel for selling arms to Iran in 1985, even as it urged other governments to stop all military sales to the country. US motives seemed designed partly to induce pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon to release Americans held captive there, and partly to improve relations with Iran.

In more recent related developments, indicatative of Iran's true pragmatic colors, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 20 June 1999, published a report claiming that Iranian President Khatami had sought Britain's help in mediating disarmament talks between Iran and Israel. Although Iran's foreign ministry blasted the report the next day and its release would seem doomed not only to sink the talks, but also to seal the fates of 13 Iranian Jews about to go on trial in Iran on allegations of spying for Israel and the US. However, the decision to release details of back channel Iran-Israel negotiations may be a warning to Iran's hard-liners that Israel is willing to release details of 20 years of such talks—dossiers that could ruin more than a few of Iran's great Islamic revolutionaries.[308] Moreover, in Iran-Contra, Israel supplied the weapons destined for Iran. The *Haaretz* article was a shot across the bow of any Iranian official who believed Israel had any need to conceal and maintain its secret links to Iran more than Iran needs to conceal and maintain those same links. Should Israel choose to publish a chronicle of back channel relations with Iran, there are a host of great Islamic revolutionaries who stand to lose a great deal. More than just 13 Jews could hang for the stories *Haaretz* could publish. And while Israel was willing to publicly blow a minor peripheral back channel negotiation with Khatami to make its point to the hard liners, Khatami would only stand to gain should Israel choose to release a more complete expose, as it would not only sink his foes but also paint Iran historically in a more moderate light.

Thus, Iran's political and regional isolation, as well as its economic debilitation, explains a great deal about its foreign policy orientations and formulation. This results not only from the prolonged and costly conflict with Iraq, a country that is itself isolated, but also because of Tehran's purposefully hostile and aggressive policy towards the member states of the GCC. There are several explanations for this antagonism. These include the fundamentally pro-Western and specifically pro-US orientation of the GCC states,[309] the ideological factors that do not automatically divide the Persian, Shi'a

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[308] STRATFOR, "Israel Fires Warning Shot at Iran," (22 June 1999) on the internet at <http://www.stratfor.com> [Accessed on 10 November 1999]. Remember, it was the Ayatollah Khomeini's hard-liners who participated in the "Iran-Contra" arms for hostages swap of the 1980s.

[309] For example, the US did go to war to liberate Kuwait.

Islamic state from its primarily Arab, Sunni political neighbors but that do help to exacerbate the already deep political divisions between them, and the profound disagreement among these regional states about the definitions and implications of Gulf security strategy. To balance these conflicting ties, Iran has made a concerted effort to improve relations with its non-Arab neighbors to the north, east, and west. Thus, it has worked assiduously with neighbors like Turkey, Pakistan, and Syria to countervail its insecure Arab borders to the south.[310]

2. Iran-Iraq War Cease-Fire

The Ayatollah Khomeini himself made a similar neorealist choice when he decided to accept the cease-fire with Baghdad, despite the years of ideological rhetoric he had delivered declaring that the war would never end until "Hussein was deposed and Iraq in ruins."[311] In 1987, Iran's leaders prepared for what they hoped to be a last round of offensives designed to end the war and topple the Iraqi government. As the situation became steadily graver, international concern mounted. In July the UN Security Council passed Resolution 598, calling for both sides to stop fighting, withdraw to the pre-war border, and submit to an objective international body to determine responsibility for the war. Iraq seized on the resolution, but Iran refused to end hostilities with victory so near. Iran continued its attacks but did not achieve the victory for which it had hoped. By 1988, Iraq, sufficiently rearmed and regrouped, drove the Iranians out of Al Faw and several other border areas. Iran was in no position to launch a counterattack, and the international situation seemed increasingly favorable to Iraq. Finally, many Iranian leaders, acknowledging the futility in further warfare, worked to persuade Khomeini to accept Resolution 598.[312] Although the resolution failed to provide key Iranian aims—such as an end to Hussein's government, payment of reparations, or clear identification of

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[310] Green, Jerrold D. "Iran and Gulf Security," in Long, David E. and Koch, Christian, editors, *Gulf Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1997), 19-20.

[311] Karsh, 29.

[312] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1 February 1993), 17.

Iraq as the initiator of the war—Khomeini endorsed the cease-fire in July. On August 20, 1988, both sides ceased fighting in accordance with the terms of Resolution 598.[313]

C. THE EXISTENTIAL THREAT FROM ISRAEL

Two themes emerge from a review of statements by top regime leaders over the past ten years of the threats facing the Islamic Republic: they fear, or claim they fear, an attack by the US, or an attack by Israel; or some conspiratorial combination of the two. From the Iranian perspective, this is not without some basis: the US has been bombarding, almost daily, various military targets in Iraq, Iran's neighboring state, since the mid-1990s. Operation *Desert Storm* was a sobering experience for Iranian leaders. Iran had just emerged from being roundly defeated by Saddam Hussein; and here, an even stronger Saddam was ripped to shreds by the US military, which fielded weapons previously, unimagined by anyone in the region. If the Americans could do that to Iraq, what could not they do to Iran? [314]

Likewise, Israel has directly threatened Iran as well in recent years. In 1997, Israel reportedly was planning an attack on Iran's nuclear installations once it received new, long-ranged F-151 aircraft from the US.[315] The $85 million US-built F-151 can deliver a heavy weapon load at low level over very long distances, advertising pinpoint accuracy. The twenty-five F-151's ordered by Israel would give it the capability to fly under the radar detection envelope and strike all the Arab states, including Iran. In fact, refueled by air, the F-151 can easily reach as far as Pakistan, or deep into Russia, to deliver its payload.[316] If just having this capability was not

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[313] Brown, Nathan J. "Iran-Iraq War," *Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000* (Inter Microsoft Corporation, 1997-2000) on the internet at http://encarta.msn.com [Accessed on 2 March 2000].

[314] Chubin, Shamram. "Iran and Nuclear Weapons: Prospects For Arms Control," in *Fifty Years Of Nuclear Weapons: Proceedings of the Sixth Castiglioncello Conference*, Union of Scientists for Disarmament, Milan, Italy (1996), 125-148.

[315] The F-151 fighter is a modified export version of the US F-15 fighter aircraft, manufactured for sale to the Israel Defense Force.

[316] Margolis, Eric. "Israel and Iran: The Best of Enemies," *The Toronto Sun* (Canada, 5 July 1998) on the internet at http://www.twf.org/News/Y1998/19980705.html [Accessed on 20 March 2000].

enough to catch the attention of the Iranian leadership, Israel also publicly declared that it would use such an aircraft to bomb Iran's fledgling nuclear installations. Although, many analysts chalked-up these Israeli threats as calculated to give the embattled former Israeli President Netanyahu a badly-needed political boost, as well as, a ploy to divert attention away from the then foundering Peace Process, for Iran it stood as another confirmation that its paranoia was not unwarranted. And if the F-151s were delivered from the US, it would be confirmation that Israel was nothing more than a client state of the US ready to do *its* bidding.

What this demonstrates is the Islamic Republic of Iran has a very broad view of strategic defense, encompassing policies (such as terrorism), considered beyond the pale in the West. Planning a terrorist attack, such as the Khobar Towers bombing, is far less expensive and ultimately less dangerous for Iran, than spending billions of dollars for new offensive weapons and actually using them against the US or Israel. Terrorism provides Iran with a cheap deterrent and the ultimate in deniability. Despite a great deal of evidence, including eye-witness reports and the arrest of at least one member of the terrorist group that carried out the Dhahran bombing and admitted to having been trained in Iran, the Clinton administration has failed to take any retaliatory measures against the Islamic Republic.[317]

At the same time, Iran began development of the Shahab-3, receiving extensive technical assistance from North Korea, China, and increasingly from Russia, which became Iran's main technology partner.[318] Several journalists report the Shahab-3 to be a derivative of the 1,000-1,300 kilometer range North Korean Nodong-1 missile, well within reach of targets in Israel.[319] Although there have been conflicting reports as to

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[317] "Suspect in Saudi Bombing Caught in Canada," *Washington Post* (13 April 1997): Lexis-Nexis. [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

[318] Cordesman, Anthony H. *Iran's Military Forces in Transition* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999): 75.

[319] "Shahab-3/Zelzal-1," *Federation of American Scientists (FAS) Website*, on the internet at http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/iran/missile/shahab-3.htm [Accessed on 22 November 2000]. According to

whether Iran actually obtained this technology, journalists and experts agree that Tehran is researching the ability to field such a weapon.[320]

It is these strategic maneuvers by Tel Aviv, which persuade Iran's leaders that they have justification in their concerns of Israel as a national threat. They claim Israel wants to overthrow their regime, and destroy their society or, failing that, the leadership in Tehran claims that Israel is secretly plotting to attack Iran with nuclear weapons. Islamic Republic leaders have consistently used Israel as an excuse for their own special weapons projects. They have waged a persistent war of terrorism against Israel, including direct attacks—such as the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992—and indirect attacks against Israeli citizens carried out by Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. "Analysts have observed that attitudes toward Israel among Islamic Republic leaders lie somewhere between paranoia and total hysteria."[321]

For example, recent statements' concerning the Shahab-3 missile reveals that Iran developed this missile specifically to deter Israel, not Iran's neighbors,[322] illustrating yet another example of Iran's neorealist approach. With this tactic Iran also seeks to drive a wedge between the Arab states and the U.S. by drawing a positive balance of power with its Arab neighbors by taking up the "anti-Zionist" battle standard. Support for this is found in a commentary published shortly after the July 1998 test of the Shahab-3, where Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani said the Shahab-3 "missile was aimed firmly at a hostile

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FAS delivery of the Shahab-3 was slated to occur in 1993 but was halted due to American pressure on North Korea. However, FAS, citing Israeli press reports, contends there were deliveries of the Shahab-3 made to Iran after 1993 and that Tehran has been conducting tests of the technology.

[320] Starr, Barbara. "Iran Adds New Threat With Cruise Missile Tests," *Jane's Defense Weekly,* vol. 25, no. 6 (7 February 1996), 6.

[321] Chubin (1996), Internet. From an Iranian press conference first reported by the Islamic Republic News Agency (hereafter *IRNA) on* 16 February 1996.

[322] Clearly Iran worried about the balance of power and tension among its Arab neighbors and sought to paint itself more in the anti-Israeli, Arab camp.

Israel."[323] Furthermore, he wrote that "[a]t least in the mid-term the neighboring countries do not pose any threat."[324] Instead, said Shamkhani, Iran was worried about "the nuclear capability of the Zionist regime."[325] Two days later, Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, in clear reference to Israel, [326] called the Shahab-3 a "strategic weapon meant to guarantee the defense of the nation in face of any external threat" which was intended to "strengthen the defense of the Islamic world against any possible threat...(and) creating a military balance in the world."[327] However, the clearest expression of Iran's intention for this weapon was at the 25 September 1998 military parade in Tehran, when the Shahab-3 was first put on public display, draped with English and Farsi-language banners that said: "Israel must be wiped off the map."[328] In an interview after the parade, Defense Minister Shamkhani was even more explicit: "We have written on the warhead of the Shahab-3 that this will not land in any Islamic country," he told reporters. "Of course this program will be pursued and we will have the Shahab-4 and even the Shahab-5 to respond to our defense needs."[329]

Does this attitude continue to pervade Iranian national security thought even under the popularly mandated moderate President Khatami? Former US National Security Council staff advisor and Middle East expert Gary G. Sick observed during the

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[323] Chubin (1996), Internet.

[324] "Iran Missile Eyes 'Nuclear' Israel" *Reuters* (29 July 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 January 2000].

[325] Chubin (1998), Internet.

[326] Timmerman, Kenneth R. "Iran Keeping Its Nuclear Options Open,"*The Iran Brief* (9 October 1995); and Cordesman, Anthony H. *Iran's National Security Policy: Intentions, Capabilities and Impact.* Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 154. Well before the Shahab-3 program became public, Iranian arms control official Hassan Mashad said Iran "needs to have long-range missiles to deter an Israeli attack" on Iranian nuclear or other facilities...You cannot expect a nation with legitimate security concerns to sit idly by in the face of a threat. If you tell them not to go nuclear, then what option do you leave open for them?"

[327] "Shahab-3, A Weapon to Create Military Balance in World," *IRNA (* 31 July 1998) on the internet at http://www.irna.com [Accessed on 5 March 2000].

[328] Ibid.

[329] "Shamkhani Unveils Shahab-4 and Shahab-5," *International Iran Times* (2 October 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 5 March 2000].

question and answer period of a recent Department of State (DoS) press conference following a speech by Secretary Madeline Albright:

> [A] gentleman from the audience asked the panel members to comment on groups in the US who could be opposed to a normalization of ties between the Iran and the US, specifically naming AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) as the leading example. The question was met with deafening silence. Not a single panel member took upon himself to say a word. This is nothing short of a testament to Israel's deep influence and power in Washington D.C., and very sad that even those from academia perhaps feel uncomfortable to tackle this "ghost at the table" of Iran-US relations--as if such discussions are taboo or could adversely impact their stature or reputation.[330]

It is instances like this that further feed Iranian perceptions that there is an alleged *fusion* of foreign policy objectives between the US and Israel, which ultimately threaten Iran.

D. IRAN AND THE PEACE PROCESS

There is no ambiguity regarding Iran's political hostility to Israel. The Iranian regime has issued many statements that effectively deny Israel's right to exist. Iran has been a vehement opponent of the Israel-PLO peace settlement, and some leading Iranian religious and political figures have called for the use of armed violence to prevent it.[331] One of the very first acts of the provisional government was to condemn the quasi-diplomatic Iranian-Israeli relationship fostered by the Shah and to turn over the former Israeli mission in Tehran to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). All trade with Israel was banned, especially the sale of oil. Iranian leaders contended that Israel's existence was illegitimate, because it came about because of the destruction of Palestine. Therefore, Iran advocated eradicating Israel, reconstituting Palestine, and denouncing as

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[330] Robinson, Glenn E. Personal correspondence (Email). Original comments by Gary Sick, dated 17 March 2000/11:52 a.m., and forwarded to the author from Professor Robinson on 20 March 2000/12:09 p.m.

[331] Cordesman and Hashim, 158

traitors those Arabs who advocated compromise with Israel, such as Egypt's Anwar Sadat.[332]

In October 1991, Iran sponsored an "International Conference to Support the Islamic Revolution in Palestine" that included representatives of Hamas, the Hezbollah, PFLP-GC, and Abu-Musa. All of the groups have been associated with terrorist violence. Iranian officials have held high-level meetings with Palestinian extremist groups in Damascus and hosted other meetings of the Hezbollah and Hamas in Iran. Several of these groups—including Hamas and Islamic Jihad—made statements acknowledging Iranian funding in 1993.[333]

1. The Arab-Israeli Conflict and Iran

Iran has strongly opposed each step forward in the peace process. Iranian radio referred to the Gaza-Jericho agreement between Israel and the PLO as "a stain of shame" and "unprecedented treachery." [334] On 11 February 1995, Iranians, marching at a rally in Tehran's Azadi Square marking the sixteenth anniversary of the overthrow of the Shah, chanted slogans like "death to America" and "death to Israel." President Rafsanjani reinforced this sentiment with a speech acknowledging Iran's encouragement of anti-Israeli, Palestinian, and Lebanese groups. Iran vehemently attacked the Palestinian elections in January 1996 and charged that only one in fifteen Palestinians had voted. It claimed that Arafat's victory in the elections was a fraud that did nothing more than "demonstrate the legitimacy of the combatant groups among the people of Palestine."[335]

Iran also seems to have encouraged Hamas and Islamic Jihad to execute the wave of bombings that took place in the months before the Israeli election in May 1996. Concurrently, Iran stepped up its arms shipments to the Hezbollah during the months

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[332] United States Library of Congress, *Iran: Country Study*, on the internet at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field (DOCID+om0091 [Accessed 28 June 2000].

[333] Cordesman and Hashim, 158-59.

[334] Ibid.

[335] Ibid.

preceding the Israeli election-cycle. For example, discovered at the Belgian port of Antwerp in March 1996 was a major shipment of arms and explosives destined for Iranian terrorists based in Germany for use against Israeli and Jewish targets in Europe. Iran views Hezbollah as its spearhead in the battle against Israel.[336] According to analysts at the commercial intelligence analysis company STRATFOR, reliable reports indicate that since April 1996, thirty Iranian planes loaded with ammunition and weapons have landed at Damascus airport. Their cargo, which included *SAGGER*[337] anti-tank missiles, long range *Katyusha* [338]rockets and high explosive anti-tank mines, was subsequently transferred to Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon. [339] Tehran reportedly sent ten flights worth of arms in the 45 days before the Hezbollah began a major series of rocket attacks on Israel in April 1996.[340] Further, Iran provided the Hezbollah with some 500-900 additional Russian-made *Katyushas.* Iran almost certainly encouraged the wave of Hezbollah rocket attacks on Northern Israel that helped lead to a major Israeli confrontation with Lebanon in early May 1996 and international rebuke on Tel Aviv. It is likely that the timing for these attacks was to both delay peace negotiations between Israel and the PLO and to try to influence Israeli public opinion to vote for the Likud, rather than the Labor Party.[341]

Other support Iran is alleged to provide is financial funds and training. Of particular note, Iran was instrumental in the founding of Hezbollah and continues to fund

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[336] STRATFOR. "Israel Fires Warning Shot at Iran," Internet.

[337] The SAGGER, also known by the US designation AT-3, was first seen in 1961. The SAGGER is a wire-guided antitank guided missile with a shaped-charge HEAT warhead and may be employed as a man-packed missile, on vehicles, and from rotary-wing aircraft. AT-3 is classed by weight as portable (21-40 kg), rather than manportable (<21 kg). The launcher is also a missile carry case. The SAGGER is capable of engaging targets at ranges of 500 to 3,000 meters and can penetrate over 400 mm of armor.

[338] The *Katyusha*, is a 1960s technology, truck mounted, short-range rocket launcher consisting of an adjustable metal framework and containing up to 16 rocket launching tracks. It could be raised to any firing angle, set up on the ground and had a range of about 4 miles.

[339] STRATFOR. "Israel Fires Warning Shot at Iran," Internet.

[340] These flights stand out compared with one flight every three months in 1995.

[341] Cordesman and Hashim, 159.

its operations at a level of approximately US$80 million per year, which is to be increased in 1997 to US$100 million. Furthermore, according to public reports Hezbollah terrorists receive training at Iranian military installations with Teheran maintaining close contact with the Hezbollah hierarchy through its embassy in Beirut.[342]

According to Cordesman, then Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi, met in the Iranian Embassy in Syria with representatives from several prominent terrorist organizations in the Levant.[343] Further, Hussein Sheikhoeslam,[344] an official in the Iranian Foreign Ministry, accompanied Habibi and one of the men responsible for taking hostages at the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, to the meeting, which likely provided money to Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Hezbollah. Following this meeting Sheikhoeslam declared publicly, "The Islamic Revolution is in for a glorious future...(t)here is no peaceful solution. The Israelis must return to the countries they came from."[345]

More moderate Iranians, however, have argued that Iran should do nothing to hinder the peace process, allowing it to collapse under its own contradictions. President Rafsanjani has said that while Iran does not support the peace process it will do nothing to undermine it: "Practically speaking, we do not take any action against the peace plan. When we see this whole process is unjust, we state our opposition as a matter of principle. But if the content of the peace plan is just, the substance is just, we shall go along with it."[346]

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[342] STRATFOR, "Israel Fires Warning Shot at Iran," Internet.

[343] Cordseman and Hashim, 159. They were reportedly Emad al-Alami, the main leader of Hamas in the Iranian Embassy in Syria; Ramadan Abdullah Shalah, the leader of Islamic Jihad, and leaders of the Lebanese Hezbollah during the week between the first two major bus bombings in Jerusalem.

[344] Hussein Sheikhoeslam is responsible for activities to promote Islamic revolutionary and resistance movements.

[345] Cordesman (1999), 134.

[346] Cordesman and Hashim, 160.

Official statements by then Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati similarly support a possible shifting in the Iranian position:

> We do not believe that the recent developments (Arab-Israeli negotiations) are progressing in this direction (establishing peace). There are conditions, and perhaps desires and objectives, promoted by the Zionist regime. According to this Zionist desire, if Israel fails to control the region by maintaining it occupation of the Arab territory under the well known international conditions and circumstances, it will seek to control the region by controlling economy and culture in the Arab and Muslim states...We believe that there is an Arab and Islamic determination to resist it. My explanation for this issue is based on my conviction that there is no similarity or harmony between the Zionist state and other states in the region, particularly if we remember Israel's history which is replete with crime, aggression and the occupation of territory.[347]

These statements, however, are often contradictory. Iranian President Rafsanjani also declared in February 1996 that the Arab-Israeli peace process posed a "great danger to the Palestinian cause," and added that the "Islamic Republic of Iran, with its immense resources, possibilities and facilities and revolutionary spirit, is the staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause." The Iranian government and media welcomed the attacks Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah made on Israel in 1996 and the devastating suicide bombings of February-March 1996 as divine retribution. Why take this contradictory stance? Indeed, Iran has been a pendulum of signals to the West regarding Israel in recent years.

Iran has strongly objected to the new contacts between Israel and moderate Arab states like Morocco and Oman. When Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Oman, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry stated that, "Allowing occupiers to get a foothold in the region not only paves the way for the Zionist regime to come out of isolation, it also prepares the ground for creation of discord and infiltration into the ranks

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[347] Ibid., 160

of Moslems...(It is) detrimental to the unity of Moslem nations and the region's peace and security."[348]

In a similar vein, concerning the Arab-Israeli peace process since Oslo, Iran has shown that it remains committed to the proposition that Israel has no right to exist and that its destruction is a desideratum. The following statements, coming from the highest levels of authority in Teheran, give evidence of the ideological obsession, which Iran has with Israel's very existence:

> The government and people of Iran are of the opinion that the Israeli entity is false and artificial. In fact there is no nation named 'Israel'...The Zionists scraped together some people from all over the world and, based only on racism, brought about the Zionist regime by virtue of the conquest of Palestine;[349] [and] The power of Islam will ultimately bring about the end of the usurpatory and rootless Zionist regime, which has forced its presence upon Palestinian land and which must be destroyed;[350] [finally,] When others talk about liberating Palestine they mean the 'annexed' territories of 1967, we mean all Palestinian Land...Iran is the only country which is opposed to the basic existence of Israel.[351]

2. Terrorism and the Peace Process

Since President Khatami's election in 1997, several senior officials have condemned terrorism. In November 1997, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi condemned a terrorist attack on tourists by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood; while in early January 1998, Foreign Ministery spokesman, Mahmoud Mohammadi, condemned attacks on civilians in Algeria. President Khatami also condemned these attacks on innocent

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[348] Ibid., 161.

[349] Khamene'i, Ali, Supreme Spiritual Leader, Islamic Republic of Iran "Addressing Senior Officers of the Iranian Air Force, " *Radio Tehran* (8 February 1996) as cited in "Iran and Hizbullah," The Information Division, Israel Foreign Ministry on the internet at http://www.israel-info.gov.il/ [Accessed 3 February 2000].

[350] Ibid.

[351] Velayeti, Ahmed, Foreign Minister, Islamic Republic of Iran. Interview in *Salaam.* (6 February 1996) as cited in "Iran and Hizbullah," The Information Division, Israel Foreign Ministry, on the internet at http://www.israel-info.gov.il/ [Accessed 3 February 2000].

civilians, including Israelis, in his January CNN message to the American people. Khatami stated, "Any form of killing of innocent men and women who are not involved in confrontation is terrorism" and that "terrorism should be condemned in all its forms."[352] These all reflect positive steps on the part of Iran's leadership in the eyes of the West. However, despite these positive public statements, Iran continues to support groups engaged in terrorism and to assassinate opponents of the clerical regime. Iran is still heavily involved in state supported terrorism: it still funds, trains, and arms groups that engage in terrorism; senior Iranian officials continue meeting with representatives of terrorist groups such as Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah;[353] Iranian intelligence continues to stalk American personnel in Bosnia, the Persian Gulf, and Tajikistan, to gain information that would be needed for terrorist attacks on Americans; and Tehran continues to attack opponents of the regime.[354]

3. Iran's Opposition to the Peace Process

Not even the supposedly reform-minded Khatami has been willing to mention possible relations with Israel. In his famous "Dialogue of Civilizations" speech, Khatami singled out the "Zionist regime" as the only state Iran would not recognize. Some of Iran's harshest vitriol toward Israel comes on *Jerusalem Day*, the last Friday in *Ramadan*, when Iran sponsors demonstrations, both domestic and abroad, calling for Jerusalem's liberation. In 1998, former Iranian president Rafsanjani, declared in his Jerusalem Day speech, "The crimes that the Zionists committed were far greater compared to those of Hitler."[355] This is certainly not a moderate tone from a media-labeled moderate; however,

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[352] United States Department of State *Annual Report, Patterns of Global Terrorism 1997*, on the internet at internet at http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/ 1997Report/1997index.html [Accessed 12 October 1999].; and *Cable News Network* (hereafter *CNN*), Archieves (7 January 1998) on the internet at http://cnn.com/WORLD/ 9801/07/iran/interview.html [Accessed on 23 October 1999].

[353] Khatami himself met with Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in Tehran one month before Hezbollah tried infiltrating a suicide bomber into Israel in November 1997.

[354] Clawson, Patrick, et al. *Iran Under Khatami: A Political, Economic, and Military Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998): 86-7.

[355] Rubin, Michael. "Iran And The Prospects For Syria-Israel Peace ," *PeaceWatch,* Report Number 237 (22 December 1999), on the internet at. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/ policywatch2000/237.htm [Accessed on 21 February 2000].

from a neorealist perspective it makes sense. Iran continues to see Israel as both a direct threat and as a foil of American policy in the Middle East and therefore continues to posture against *Zionism* in supporting the Palestinian cause.[356]

In the days after the restart of Syrian-Israeli talks on 6 December 1999, the Iranian press was mute, but it has since taken an increasingly hostile stance. On 31 December, *Majlis* Speaker 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri called for "wiping Israel off the world map" and Supreme Leader Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i called for the "annihilation" of Israel.[357] In a clear criticism of Syria for negotiating with Israel, Khamene'i said, "I don't want to cite the one-time revolutionary nations by name . . . but any negotiation with the Zionist regime amounts to treason."[358]

E. BALANCE OF POWER QUESTIONS

Ideologically, secular Turkey and Islamist Iran are polar opposites. Naturally, each sees the other as an unwelcome example and source of inspiration to subversives within its own society. Whereas Turkish officials are convinced, Iran has emerged as the region's leading supporter of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), even while continuing its long-time support to Islamist movements within Turkey.[359] Turkish officials reported believe that Iran provides the PKK with weapons, training, and funds, and that it hosts up to fifty PKK camps. Ankara recently claimed, "After Syria halted its support of the PKK to a certain extent, Iran took over Syria's role [as the PKK's leading state supporter]." [360]

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[356] Ironically, while Iran has paid heavily for its support of terror/guerrilla organizations in the name of the Palestinian issues, as well as its anti-Israeli rhetoric, both the PLO and most Palestinians supported Iraq during the war with Iran.

[357] Rubin, Michael "Europe's Critical Dialogue With Iran: An Assessment," *PolicyWatch, Number 43* (10 January 2000), on the internet at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch2000/433.htm [Accessed on 21 February 2000].

[358] Ibid.

[359] The Turks now reject the notion that PKK cross-border activity is strictly the result of Iran's inability to control its border—Tehran's traditional explanation—though some Turkish officials privately blame the hostile action strictly on Iranian hardliners acting independently, rather than on the government of President Muhammad Khatami.

[360] Makovsky, Internet.

In similar fashion compared with Israel, Iran generally sees Turkey as a pro-US, and now pro-Israeli, regional rival of growing strength—in short, as an agent and potential launching pad for its enemies.[361] The Iranians particularly object to a 1996 Turkish-Israeli military cooperation agreement that allows Israeli jets to exercise in Turkish airspace four times a year. Iran's concerns that Turkey has brought the once-distant Israeli enemy to the edge of the Iranian border were fanned by numerous press reports suggesting that Turkey and Israel are cooperating in intelligence gathering against Iran.

Figure 4. Iran once felt removed from a direct Israeli threat.[362]

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[361] Piccoli, 34.

[362] TFigure cropped and annotated by the author. Taken from large map found at *Maps of the Middle East* (The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection The University of Texas at Austin) on the internet at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/middle_east.htm [Accessed 4 September 2000]. The *barrier* depicts Tehran's level of comfort and isolation in Israel's ability to directly reach Iranian territory.

As Figure 4 shows, Iran once felt some level of comfort with the buffering states of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia between Iranian borders and Israel. Today the military cooperation agreement between Turkey and Israel has created a new vulnerability to Iranian security. Figure 5 graphically depicts a scenario wherein the Israelis gain compliance with their new Turkish allies to initiate air strikes against the Iranian homeland. This is a scenario that Tehran now fears possible under Turkey and Israel's new treaty.

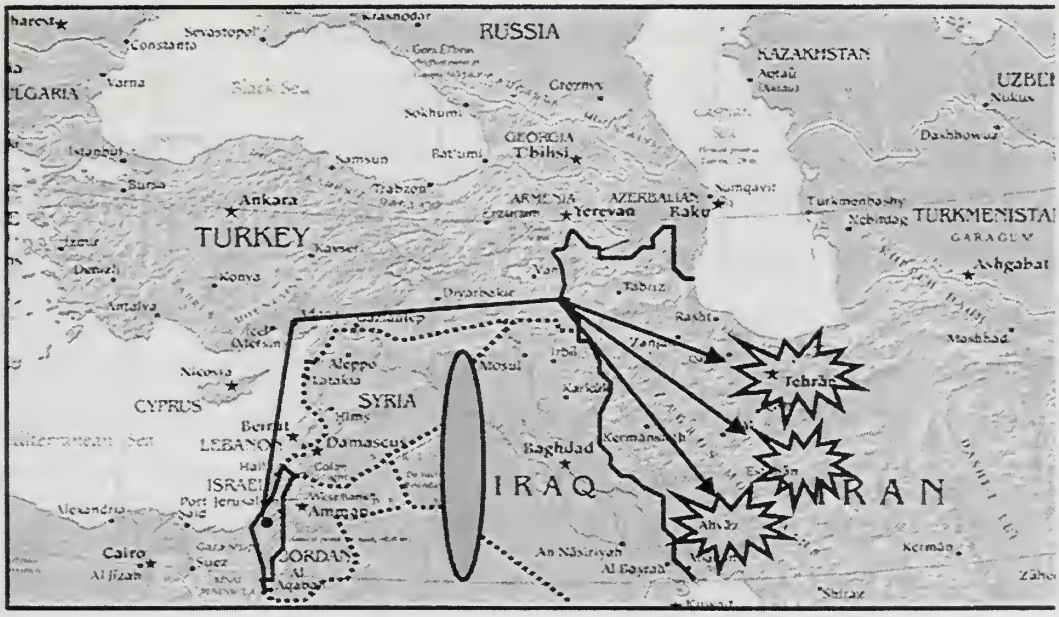

Figure 5. Iranian perceptions of vulnerability to Israeli attack.[363]

[363] Figure cropped and annotated by the author; taken from large map found at *Maps of the Middle East* (The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection The University of Texas at Austin) on the internet at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/middle_east.htm . [Accessed 4 September 2000].

Moreover, Tehran also suspects Turkey of subversion. It accuses Ankara of giving refuge to members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, opponents of the Iranian regime. (This is not quite the mirror image of Turkey's accusations about Iranian support for the PKK, as Iran does not claim that the group uses Turkish territory to attack Iran.) Tehran also probably worries that Ankara seeks to subvert the Islamic Republic's large Turkic-language-speaking Azeri minority, which constitutes some one-fourth of Iran's population.[364]

As for Syria, it has been a principal ally to the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East since 1982, involving both political and economic ties. At the time of this *de facto* alliance formation, Iran supported the government of Hafiz al Assad against the Muslim Brotherhood, which had risen in rebellion against the secularizing policies of the ruling Ba'ath Party. Iran's backing of the Syrian government was significant because the Muslim Brotherhood was the first Islamic political group to claim the Iranian Revolution as the primary inspiration for its rebellion. Soon after the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Damascus shut down the pipeline through which Iraqi oil crossed Syria to reach Mediterranean ports. This action against another Arab state, ruled by the Ba'ath party, was an important gesture in support of the Iranian war effort. The action was also a hostile blow against Iraq because of the blockade of Iraq's Persian Gulf ports since the beginning of the war, and the only other exit route for its oil exports was through a smaller pipeline traversing Turkey. Iran had agreed to provide Syria 20,000 barrels of oil per day free of charge as compensation for the transit fees Syria would lose by closing the pipeline. Iran also agreed to sell Syria additional oil it required, at a heavily discounted price. In 1987, this agreement was again renewed. Syria also provided Iran arms from its own stock of Soviet- and East European-made weapons.[365]

Recent diplomatic revelations concerning the potential for the signing of a bilateral peace treaty between Syria and Turkey seems to have caught Tehran off guard.

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[364] Makovsky, Internet.

[365] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 117.

Likewise, Tehran views with great concern Syria's apparent readiness to end its state of war with Israel. Over the past decade, this relationship has been more political than material, built upon intelligence cooperation; mutual antipathy toward Iraq, Israel, Turkey, and the more moderate Arab states; and support for terrorist groups like Hezbollah. Cooperation in intelligence and security is especially strong. The most active aspect of Iran-Syria relations has been support for Hezbollah and other terrorist groups.[366] The Israeli paper *Yediot Ahronot* reports that Prince Bashar, Assad's son and designated heir, to be heading soon to Tehran to soothe Iran. Recent meetings between Iran's and Hezbollah's leaderships and strong signals in Iran's press against the Syria-Israel peace process suggest that Tehran is preparing to step up its anti-peace process action.[367]

1. Hezbollah and Iran's Involvement in Lebanon

The June 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon fuelled the Ayatollah Khomeini's interest in supporting the PLO. He condemned the "deathly silence" of the Arab states that failed to come to the aid of the besieged Palestinians and called for their use of the oil weapon to pressure the West to condemn Israel. The struggle against Israel, Tehran proclaimed had to be "Islamized," that is, extended to embrace the whole Muslim world. According to Rafsanjani, then Speaker of the *Majlis*, achieving the eradication of the "Zionist regime" could only be done by massing all the capabilities of the Islamic world, primarily Iran, Syria, Libya, and Algeria. In December 1979, Iran had dispatched some 200-300 "volunteers" to join their "Palestinian brothers" in fighting against Israel in southern Lebanon. Following a protest by the then Lebanese President Sarkis, Syrian President Assad sent them to one of Fatah's military camps some 15 miles from Damascus, and promised that they would never be permitted to enter southern Lebanon.[368] In September 1981, Khomeini had created the Supreme Council of the

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[366] Rubin, M., *Report Number 237.*

[367] Ibid.

[368] Ramzani, Rouhollah K *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East (* Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988): 156; and Alexander, Yonah and Sinai Joshua. *Terrorism: The PLO Connection* (New York: Taylor & Francis, Inc., 1989), 74-75.

Islamic Revolution, a body supervising terrorist operations. Recruiting men from Shi'a communities throughout the world, he brought them to Iran for indoctrination and training in the nine boot camps in Iran, and formed them into the Islamic Revolutionary Movement.[369] Hezbollah's primary backer is Iran, from which it receives money and weapons, much of it channeled through Damascus, which is host to numerous terrorist organizations' headquarters and has twice-weekly Iran Air service to Tehran. The key issues in gauging the effect of peace talks on the Syrian-Iranian relationship will be the level of Hezbollah terrorism during the peace talks, the constraints placed by Syria on Iranian access to Hezbollah, and the extent of Iranian efforts to circumvent Syria in supplying Hezbollah.[370]

Since 1990, the Iranian financed Hezbollah has dramatically increased the tempo of military operations against Israeli and SLA units operating in the "security zone". By these operations, Hezbollah seeks to force a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the zone, while improving its standing among Lebanon's Shiites at the expense of its main rival, Amal. Hezbollah carried out 19 attacks on Israel and South Lebanon Army (SLA) personnel in the zone in 1990, 52 attacks in 1991 (eclipsing Amal in the process), 63 attacks in 1992, 158 attacks in 1993 (not including *Operation Accountability*), 187 attacks in 1994, and 344 attacks in 1995. Thus, hardly a day went by last year in which Hezbollah did not attack Israeli and SLA personnel. Out of the 344 attacks in 1995, there were 270 incidents of artillery fire (usually involving long-range small arms, mortar, Katyusha, and antitank missile fire), 64 roadside bombings (both suicide and remotely controlled), and two infantry assaults. Hezbollah has also conducted terrorist operations against Israeli targets abroad; in March 1992, for example, a Hezbollah car bomb blew up the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires (killing 30) in retaliation for the assassination of Hezbollah leader Abbas Musawi several weeks earlier.[371] Underscoring Syria's role in

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[369] Anderson, Jack and Atta, Dale Van. "Tehran Calls the Shots for Terrorists," *Washington Post* (19 August 1987), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 21 October 1999].

[370] Rubin, M., *Report Number 237.*

[371] Eisenstadt, Michael. " Hezbollah Operations: Past Patterns, Future Prospects," *PolicyWatch,* Number 197 (May 7, 1996) on the internet at http://222.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch1996/197.htm [Accessed on 22 October 1999]; and Khalilzad, Zalmay M., Shlapak, David A.,

supporting Hezbollah's rearmament since April's *Grapes of Wrath* operation by Israel, Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Sheikh Fadlallah said on 13 December: "Syrian President Hafez al-Assad assumed a firm and responsible stand on the side of the [Islamic] resistance; if it were not for [al-Assad's support], Israel's agents would have ... destroy[ed] the resistance."[372]

2. Iran's Possible Future Actions

If one extends systematic power balancing explanations to a wider global setting, the Syrian-Iranian alliance might be rooted in a shared interest in deflecting US hegemony over the region. At a regional level itself, this could take the form of balancing the pro-Western axis in the Middle East, which currently includes regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This seemingly permanent by-product of the exceptional penetration of the Middle East subsystem naturally tends to generate its own opposition.[373]

Of course, geopolitics does not fully determine alliances, and where it leaves some choice of alliances, domestic factors are likely to become more important. For example, for Iran under the Shah, an Israeli alliance was an alternative to balance against the radical secular states of Iraq and Syria in the 1960s and 1970s. Conversely, the new Islamic Republic of Iran replaced its Israeli alliance with a Syrian one, making it appear that the new regime's policies were ideology determinative.[374] Anti-imperialism, in the sense of opposition to the regional dominance of the global superpowers and their

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and Byman, Daniel L. *The Implications of the Possible End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict for Gulf Security.* (Santa Monica, California: the RAND, Corporation, 1997), 12-13. Eisenstadt notes that these actions exacted a mounting toll on IDF and SLA personnel. Attacks on the security zone resulted in 13 Israeli killed in 1992, 12 in 1993, 21 in 1994, 23 in 1995, and 7 for the first quarter of 1996 (SLA losses were roughly twice these). Moreover, the exchange ratio between the two sides grew increasingly unfavorable for Israel and the SLA. The ratio of Hezbollah to Israeli dead was 5:1 in 1990; 2:1 in 1991; 1.7:1 in 1992; and it has more or less hovered around 1.5:1 or so since then.

[372] Eisenstadt, Internet.

[373] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 87.

[374] Cordesman (1999), 13.

regional surrogates, is one of two major roots of the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Although cautious at first, by the early 1980s, bringing Iran and Syria closer together because of shared threats from "imperialist" forces; however, Iraq's invasion in 1980 both isolated and mortally threatened Iran. Likewise, Syria felt increasingly threatened with the loss of its alliance with Egypt against Israel following the Camp David Peace Accords.[375]

Mixed rhetoric from Iran has met the Arab-Israeli peace process to date. Tehran is likely to see movement on this issue as a threat to its current power balance.[376] An Arab-Israeli peace settlement could precipitate bandwagoning[377] in which all states align against Iran, leaving the Republics national security strategy in shambles. It is for this reason that Iranian policy has seemed torn between ideological opposition to the peace agreement and the need to preserve its alliance with Syria to avoid further international and regional isolation. Both Rafsanjani and Khomene'i chose to mute any opposition they had to the peace process at this time to avoid further labeling as a pariah state and excluded from regional economic and security ties. The practical fact that Iran could actually do very little, beyond rhetoric and some financial aid to Islamist groups, as long as Syria was unready to back-out of the peace process had no doubt encouraged this restraint. Several militant Islamist groups feared the peace process would end in the surrender of Palestinian rights. However, at the time Rafsanjani was apparently willing to risk accusations of being "soft on Israel" among his domestic audience to fulfill the greater neorealist need for the defense of Iran's vital external strategic interests.[378]

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[375] Ibid., 89-90.

[376] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, Internet; and Khalilzad, *et al.,* 14-15.

[377] "Bandwagoning" is a term used by international relation theorists to explain a state's alliance behavior. It is the opposite of "balancing," which seeks where the state seeks alliances against another state. Bandwagoning is used as a strategy pursued by smaller states in order to survive to ally with others against a common threat. See Martin, Susan B. "Balances of Power versus Balancing: A Conceptual Analysis," *Working Paper Series #99-02,* Christopher H. Browne Center for International Politics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, May 1999 on the internet at http://www.sas.upenn.edu/penncip/ Reports/ BOPVBAL.htm [Accessed on 11 December 2000].

[378] Cordesman (1999), 190-91.

Why is Iran worried? A successful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict which achieves Palestinian rights and recovery of some lost Arab territory would give all concerned (except Iran) an interest in the stability of this new Middle East structure. That is why the Oslo accord revived Iranian alarm over the direction of the peace process in 1990. To confront Oslo, Iran reputedly urged Syria to pull out of the peace talks and escalate the resistance in southern Lebanon. Iran would fund the creation of a Lebanese-Palestinian Islamic front there to militarily challenge the accord. Tehran even went so far as to approve sending heavy weapons to Hezbollah; however, Syria rejected this and blocked the transit of the weapons. Unfortunately, given both the Islamic Republic's rhetoric and the power-grip of radicals, there is little optimism that Iran's relations with Israel will thaw in the event of Syria-Israel peace. Even after any future Israeli-Palestinian deal, an Iranian détente with Israel will move at a glacial pace, if at all.

a. Iran Could Do Nothing

In the wake of the announcement of the resumption of Israel-Syria talks, Iran's media, showing restraint, reported the minimum, and offered little commentary. Although Iran might oppose Middle East peace in principle, it could choose not to pose obstacles to its path. In part because of their common religion with many Palestinians, Iranians are generally sympathetic to the Palestinians. According to conversations on the streets of Tehran and provincial capitals, however, the Palestinian question is not at the forefront of their concern.[379] Indeed, Iranians have in common with Israelis the fact that almost every person has a family member or close friend who died in a war with an Arab state. On 18 November 1999, the moderate *Iran News* called for a wait-and-see attitude, voicing the dilemma that while some think "that peace with the Zionists is unthinkable and Palestinian combatants must be supported all the way," others feel that if the Islamic world and the majority of Palestinians make peace, than Iran should follow. Although some candidates for the 18 February 2000 parliamentary elections may hold such a view, they are unlikely to express this opinion openly—an act

[379] Khalilzad, *et al.*, 24-25.

that would only embolden hardliners and the Council of Guardians, which vets and disqualifies candidates it considers too moderate.[380]

b. Iran Could Derail the Process

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has used its vitriol toward "the Zionist Entity" to deflect attention from its own internal woes and to stake a claim to leadership of the Islamic world. Indeed, Iran currently holds the three-year chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.[381] On 18 December 1999, the pro-Khamene'i, pro-intelligence services *Jumhuri-yi Islami* castigated Damascus, declaring that "Syria . . . has recognized the sinister and illegitimate existence of the occupiers of Palestine."[382] Ominously, during his Friday sermon on 17 December 1999, Khamene'i himself threatened, "We will catch by the scruff of the neck those defending the betrayal of the Palestinian people." [383] Even if Iran chooses not to act against Syria, there are signs it may indeed choose to heighten its violent opposition to the peace process. In Lebanon, Iranian officials allegedly train operatives from Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). Israel reports some Hamas members killed have been among those in recent clashes in southern Lebanon. This coordination could lead to new fronts in anti-peace-process terrorism.[384]

F. SUMMARY

In summary, while it is not yet clear whether the operation will jumpstart Israeli-Syrian negotiations—as envisioned in the "understanding" negotiated by former US Secretary of State Warren Christopher—its impact on Hezbollah is more straightforward. Despite its claims of victory, Hezbollah remains constrained by various cross-pressures

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[380] Rubin, M., *Report Number 237.*

[381] Khalilzad, *et al.*, 25.

[382] Rubin, M., *Report Number 237.*

[383] Ibid.

[384] Ibid.

that will prevent it from extracting any major advantage from Israel's *Grapes of Wrath* operation and that will compel it to act with caution in the coming days.

Undoubtedly, Hezbollah would like to resume daily operations in the security zone to demonstrate that it retains its powers of resistance, as the attack on the SLA outpost indicates. Almost certainly, Iran will push these Islamic militants in this direction; however, Hezbollah is surely being asked to act with restraint by the thousands of refugees streaming back into southern Lebanon, so as not to bring additional harm to one of its main constituencies. Most importantly, Syria—the dominant power in Lebanon—may also be urging a temporary respite, although Damascus is likely to see advantages in permitting operations to resume before Israeli-Syrian negotiations reconvene.[385] Moreover, the ground-swell of popular support for the organization across confessional lines, which has reportedly led to an influx of cash contributions and sympathy, is likely to be short-lived and of limited significance. Most Lebanese do not share Hezbollah's vision or goals, and this places objective limits on Hezbollah's potential as a mass organization. Moreover, Hezbollah itself will need lots of money to repair the war-damaged infrastructure in southern Lebanon and help its supporters repair homes and businesses that were damaged in the fighting. It will thus have to balance its desire to continue active resistance against Israel, with the risk of sparking a backlash that could harm its short-term fundraising efforts if it is perceived to be responsible for a new round of fighting.[386]

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[385] Mann, Hillary. "Terror On The Horizon? Renewed Activism By Anti-Peace Radicals" *PeaceWatch, Number 113* (24 Dec 1994) on the internet at http://www. washingtoninstitute.org /watch/Policywatch/ policywatch1994/113.htm [Accessed on 13 November 1999].

[386] Eisenstadt, Internet.

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VII. IRAN AND PERSIAN GULF STATES' RELATIONS CASE STUDY

The following case study is actually an amalgamation of four smaller case studies on Iranian national security and foreign policy toward the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia will again provide compelling evidence to support the thesis that Iranian national security and foreign policy is based upon the international relations theory of neorealism.

A. BACKGROUND

Although the Shah had been unpopular among the rulers of the six states on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf, the Revolution in Iran, nevertheless, was a shock to them. Iran under the Shah had been the main guarantor of political stability in the region. Under the Republic, Iran was promising to be the primary promoter of revolution. All six countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—were ruled by hereditary monarchs who naturally feared the new rhetoric from Tehran. Indeed, during the first year following the Revolution, throughout the Gulf region numerous acts of political sabotage and violence occurred, claiming inspiration from the Iranian example. The most sensational of these was the assault by Muslim dissidents on the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Other clashes occurred between groups of local Shi'a and security forces in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain.[387]

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq further alarmed the Persian Gulf Arab states. In 1981, they joined in a collective defense alliance known as the GCC. Although the GCC announced its neutrality with respect to the Iran-Iraq War, Iran perceived its formation as part of the Iraqi war effort and generally was hostile toward it. The GCC for its part suspected Iran of supporting antigovernment groups throughout the Persian Gulf. These concerns were heightened in December 1981, when authorities in Bahrain announced the discovery of a clandestine group that had plans to carry out sabotage and

[387] United States Library of Congress, *Iran: Country Study* "Iran: Relations with Regional Powers," on the internet at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field DOCID+om0091 [Accessed 12 April 2000].

terrorist acts as part of an effort to overthrow the government; several of the plotters had links to Iranian clerics. In December 1983, a series of bombings occurred in Kuwait, including incidents at the American and French embassies; the Arab nationals who were captured and charged with these acts of terrorism were members of an Iraqi Shi'a movement, Ad Dawah, that was headquartered in Tehran. In May 1985, a suicide driver unsuccessfully tried to kill the ruler of Kuwait. [388]

Iran has sent mixed signals in dealing with its southern neighbors. It reduced its support of Islamic extremist movements within the southern Gulf after the death of Khomeini, and has often stated that it is seeking to improve its relations with the Southern Gulf states. For example, it has avoided confrontations over oil policy, and has negotiated with states like Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman over improvements in relations, and the sharing of offshore oil and gas. In May 1992, Iran gave Kuwait back six airliners that Iraq had seized and flown to Iran during the Gulf War (although only after trying to extract large fees). By the mid-1990s, the most serious issues affecting Iran's conduct towards its neighbors are Iran's actions in dealing with the UAE, and the extent to which Iran has or has not contributed to the current political upheavals in Bahrain.[389]

Until 1987, Iran and the GCC members found more reasons for cooperation than confrontation, despite suspicions of Iranian involvement in subversive activities. In general, Iran avoided dealing with the GCC as an entity, preferring to ignore its existence and to treat each country separately. Iran's relations with the six component states varied from friendliness to hostility. For example, Iran and the UAE maintained relatively cordial relations. Economic ties reinforced the political ties between the two countries. An Iranian mercantile community in the UAE was concentrated in Dubai, a city that emerged—following the destruction of Khorramshahr—as an important transit center where international goods destined for Iran found their way into smaller boats capable of entering small Iranian fishing towns that served as ports of entry despite their lack of

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[388] Ibid.

[389] Davis, Dale R. *Iran's Security Dilemma (*Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, June 1994): 2-8.

docking facilities. In Bahrain, where the ruling family was Sunni Muslim and a majority of the population was Shi'a, lingering suspicions of Iranian intentions did not inhibit the government from improving diplomatic relations with Tehran. Because there were no outstanding issues between Iran and Qatar, relations between them were generally correct.[390] Nevertheless, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait made efforts to seek a rapprochement with Iran in 1985 and 1986. The Saudi efforts were more successful and resulted in an exchange of visits between the Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers in 1985. The Saudis and Iranians also began to cooperate in some areas of mutual interest, such as international oil policy. In contrast, relations between Kuwait and Iran did not improve significantly. In the fall of 1986, Iran began to single out Kuwait's ships for retaliatory attacks, and this led to a worsening of diplomatic relations. [391] Given its geostrategic location, Iran has found its borders vulnerable on several fronts: political upheaval and civil war in Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan[392]; strong military states with active irredentism movements in Turkey and Iraq; an arms race threat among its wealthy Arab neighbors[393]; and the continued threat from a strong external power represented in the United States.[394] It is for these reasons that Tehran has seen the necessity to continue supporting Islamist groups like Hezbollah as a counterbalancing agent and the need to gain control of strategic points such as Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands.

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[390] United States Library of Congress, "Iran: Relations with Regional Powers," Internet.

[391] Ibid.

[392] For detailed discussions of these see: Cornell "Iran and the Caucasus" (1998); Fuller, Graham E. *Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan: Its Character and Prospects* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1991); and Fuller, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Afghanistan: Its Character and Prospects*; and the news reports of Pakistan's 1999 military coup.

[393] Brown, Justin "Arms Sales: Exporting US Military Edge?" *Christian Science Monitor* (2 December 1999), 2; Blanche, Ed "GCC Stages Manoeuvers as Iran Holds Naval Exercises in Strait of Hormuz" *Jane's Defence Weekly*, vol. 32, no. 15 (13 October 1999) Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 13 February 2000].

[394] Hadar, Leon. *Quagmire: America in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 1991): 40.

Iran's long-term goal in the Persian Gulf is regional security maintained solely by the Gulf littoral powers.[395] In turn, the effectiveness of this policy to maintain regional stability has hinged upon cooperation between Iran and the Arab states. Since the end of the Cold War, GCC members have sought improved relations with Iran through bilateral agreements and resumption of diplomatic relations. Relationships range along a continuum from formal recognition to nonmilitary cooperation as a short-term option, to security arrangements in the long-term.[396] Throughout the early 1990s, any gathering of GCC foreign ministers would discuss increasing cooperation with Iran, and the need to strengthen ties and common interests with the GCC to enhance stability and security in the Gulf.[397] Likewise, Iran has been presenting a more amiable diplomatic front to its Arab neighbors. This has been the case with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE—although the UAE has been slow to reciprocate given the events of 1971 and 1992 on the disputed Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs'.

B. IRAN & THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES RELATIONS

Relations between Iran and the UAE have undergone continuous tension since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In large part, these relations have revolved around the sovereignty of the three tiny islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs' (See Figure 6). Unlike the transparent Iraqi attack of Kuwait, which precipitated the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the Iran-UAE dispute dodges such easy labeling as an act of aggression. In fact, from the perspective of the Iranians this was another example of neorealist thinking. Oil forms *the* major export resource for Iran's economy. US-led sanctions against Iran have blocked any plans to diversify its economy. Therefore, oil, and Iran's ability to transport it to world buyers, is of vital national security interest to the leadership in Tehran. Likewise, due to geostrategic fate, Iran has only one natural path to transport this critical commodity and that is through the Strait of Hormuz.

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[395] Ramazani, Rouhollah K. "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South," *Middle East Journal* , vol. 46, no. 3 (Summer 1992), 399.

[396] Ibid., 81.

[397] Tripp, Charles, "The Gulf States and Iraq," *Survival* 34, no. 3, (Autumn 1992), 52.

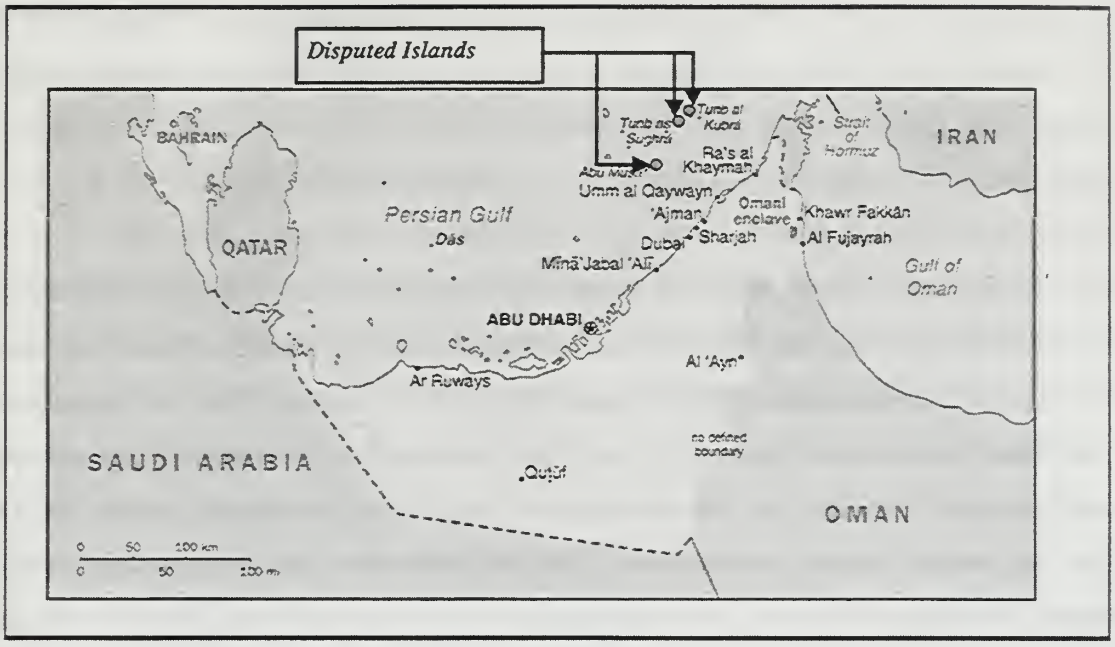

Figure 6. Map Showing Location of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb Islands.[398]

Tehran does not have to reflect far in its history to learn the lessons of national impact that interdiction of Iran's oil shipments might have on its security. It need only refer to the so-called "Tanker Wars" of the 1980s. As this episode demonstrated, Iran's ability to maintain influence on the Strait of Hormuz is a national necessity. This being true, Iran's action vis-à-vis Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb Islands is not surprising. It is an understandable national security policy decision when placed within the pragmatic framework of neorealism.

[398] *Maps of the Middle East* (The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection The University of Texas at Austin) on the internet at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/middle_east.htm . [Accessed 10 February 2000].

First, the dispute between Iran and the UAE involves complex territorial claims that long precede the emergence of the present Iranian regime. Iran and the UAE have had radically different views of the legal meaning of prior claims to the islands since the 19th century. Iran feels it had a right to the islands because it exerted at least indirect control over Abu Musa and the Tunbs before Britain's seizure of the islands in 1887,[399] pointing to claims that are more ancient.

Conversely, the UAE feels that it has the right to the islands because Iran has not exerted meaningful control over the Tunbs in modern times, while the islands were under the control of the ruling family in Ras al-Khaimah. Furthermore, the UAE argues that Abu Musa was under the control of the ruling Arab family in Sharjah, and that although the family had branches living in both Iran and Sharjah, the main branch was in Sharjah. Note that several international experts dispute the level of authority the ruling Qawasim family of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah exerted over the islands, and the fact that Qawasim paid intermittent tribute to Iran.[400]

1. The Islands Dispute Heats Up

In April 1992, Iran became involved in a serious dispute with the UAE over the control of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. These three islands are located in the lower Gulf north of Dubai and south of Qeshem Island.[401] They are north of the main shipping channels and west of the Straits of Hormuz—the entrance to the Gulf. Control of the islands offers Iran a significant potential strategic advantage; it can threaten tanker traffic through the Gulf—which involves the movement of 20 percent of the world's oil and an average of 75 ship transits per day.[402] It also improves Iran's

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[399] Amirahmadi, Hooshang. *Small Islands, Big Politics: The Tunbs and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 38.

[400] Cordesman, Anthony H. and Hashim, Ahmed S. *Iran: Dilemmas of Dual Containment* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 189-190.

[401] Amirahmadi, (1996), 43.

[402] Esquivel, James M. *Iran and the Strait of Hormuz: Varying Levels of Interdiction* (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, Dec 1997), 78.

ability to defend its key naval bases in the lower Gulf and affects competing claims to offshore oil and gas rights. Moreover, apart from its military significance, Abu Musa is rich in resources, containing half a billion barrels of oil in addition to substantial deposits of gas and red iron oxide.[403]

2. Background of the Claims

Arguments over the ownership and sovereignty of these islands remained moot as long as Britain controlled the Gulf. While the Shah's father made claims to the islands beginning in the 1930s, the British had treated claims of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah as legitimate for nearly a half-century, and the British decision stood through *force majeure*.[404] This situation changed in 1968, however, when Britain announced it was withdrawing from the Gulf. This British decision left Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah without a military protector, and the Shah acted to take advantage of the situation. After all, both the US and Britain had agreed that Iran would be the main regional security guarantor in the Gulf when Britain withdrew.[405]

a. The Shah Relieves the British

On 30 November 1971—the day before British forces formally ceased to exert military control over the emirates and Ras al-Khaimah, and the UAE gained independence—Iranian marines used hovercraft to seize Abu Musa and the Tunbs.[406] This seizure of the islands resulted in several casualties, but none of the islands then had a large native population. The Greater Tunb is little more than a barren rock, and had no population at the time, except for a few visiting fishermen. The Lesser Tunb was so small that its only previous strategic importance had been as a shipping hazard. Of the three, Abu Musa was the only island large enough to have a small port and a few square miles of territory, but its jagged surface was ill suited for a natural runway. Likewise, its

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[403] Davis, 192.

[404] Ibid., 201.

[405] Hiro, Dilip. *Dictionary of the Middle East.* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 5-6, 327.

[406] Davis, 203.

permanent population was well under 50, except for gangs of Arab laborers who mined the iron oxide on the island.[407]

The Shah soon made it clear that Iran intended to exert full sovereignty over the islands. In fact, Iran's Prime Minister, Abbas Hoveida, informed the Iranian Majlis that full Persian sovereignty "had been restored following long negotiations with the British government, and that Iran, "in no conceivable way relinquished or will relinquish its incontestable sovereignty and right of control over the whole of Abu Musa Island."[408] The Shah, however, did provide compensation to the Emir of Sharjah for the seizure of Abu Musa and allowed some Arabs from the UAE to remain on the island. The Shah also reached an agreement with Sharjah in 1971 that gave 55 percent of the affected oil and gas revenues to Iran and 45 percent to Sharjah.[409] Iran has since claimed this agreement explains why it allowed UAE citizens to continue to live and work on the island. The UAE, however, has claimed that the Shah seized Abu Musa and the Tunbs' through sheer *force majeur*, and that neither Sharjah nor Ras al-Khaimah ever agreed to accept Iran's control and sovereignty over the islands. In any case, the Shah left several aspects of control over the islands unresolved.

b. The Islamic Republic Seeks Full Control

This dual administration persisted for over two decades—through Iran's revolution into the early 1990s. Then, quite suddenly in 1992, Iran reasserted full direct control of Abu Musa. Iran claimed it did so because it had not received a fair share of the offshore oil production from the island, although the Iranian media soon began to refer to the entire island as Iranian territory and as part of "*Hormuzgan Province.*"[410] Iran expelled 100 workers that had UAE, rather than Iranian, visas and expelled many of the

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[407] Ibid., 208.

[408] Amirahmadi (1994), 46.

[409] Cordesman and Hashim, 208.

[410] "Iran and UAE Dispute Heats Up," *ArabNews.com* (4 March 1992), on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed on 23 October 1999].

Arab residents. Further, during April and May 1992, Iran staged the largest amphibious exercise it had conducted since the end of the Iran-Iraq War. This exercise took place in the Straits of Hormuz at the same time that Iran was reasserting its control of Abu Musa. It lasted 11 days, demonstrating Iranian capabilities to block the Straits from an outside invader (i.e., the US)[411]. The exercise covered an area of some 10,000 square miles of ocean, and involved 45 surface ships, 150 small craft, and an unknown number of Iranian Air Force aircraft.[412]

The UAE reacted rather belatedly to the development, but when it did, it chose to reopen the issue of the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs as well. Although the Shah had occupied all three islands in one fell swoop, there was a basic difference in the status of Abu Musa. Sharjah came to an agreement with Iran over Abu Musa, but Ras al-Khaimah did not reach such agreement with Iran over the Tunbs. In September 1992 Mustafa Haeri-Fumani, adviser to the Iranian Foreign Minister, visited the UAE for talks, which broke down over the agenda that included the Tunbs.[413] The UAE countered these developments with a proposal to solve the sovereignty problem by leasing the entire island to Iran, and altering the sharing of oil in favor of Iran. Iran rejected this proposal, and the UAE reacted by renewing its claims to the Tunbs and obtaining support from the GCC and Arab League.[414] Iran countered by breaking off talks over the issue on 28 September 1992, charging the GCC states and Arab League states with conspiring with US plotters; Iranian President Rafsanjani declared the issue an US "conspiracy...to justify its illegitimate presence in the Gulf."[415] However, in December 1993 the GCC Summit finally endorsed the UAE proposal to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice and urged Iran to agree to it. Sheikh Muhammad, Chairman of the Ministerial

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[411] Cordesman and Hashim, 209.

[412] Boyne, Lexis-Nexis.

[413] "Iran's Foreign Minister Speaks on Dispute" *The Washington Post* (10 December 1992), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 20 September 1999].

[414] Ibid.

[415] Chubin, Shahram. *Iran's National Security Policy: Intentions, Capabilities and Impact* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 97.

Council of the Summit, took every care to make the request palatable to Iran. He stated, formally: "We have mutual interests and live in the same region with Iran. There is no dispute other than the occupation."[416]

The dispute has been on the GCC agenda and is routinely included in all GCC resolutions; however, many members (except the UAE) are growing weary of making it a primary issue when Iran seems willing to seek rapprochement with its Arab neighbors. The communiqué issued at the end of the Summit held in Kuwait in December 1997 expressed satisfaction at the positive indications of Iranian policy that were demonstrated at the OIC Summit and called for the GCC-Iranian relations to be based on "peaceful co-existence, good-neighborliness, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual interest." It also called for a negotiated solution between Iran and the UAE.[417]

In the spring of 1995, Secretary of Defense William Perry referred to the Iranian deployment of chemical weapons on the island, including 155-mm shells and an Iranian force of up to 6,000 as "very threatening."[418] Some US experts believe, however, that Secretary Perry exaggerated the Iranian build-up and confused the deployment of poison gas with the deployment of non-lethal agents. They believe that the total Iranian presence on the islands and the immediate vicinity has only reached temporary maximums of about 3,700 men.[419] In May 1998, the new Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, went to the UAE to discuss the Abu Musa Island among other things. The Iranians claimed that the visit "opened new avenues for discussion on all issues including an acceptable solution to the islands." Sheikh Zayed, the Ruler of Abu Dhabi and the President of the UAE, was a little more restrained in his assessment, when he said that the two sides had agreed to continue the talks on the bilateral relations, including the

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[416] Amirahmadi (1994), 58.

[417] Quoted in Glubb, Farris. "The GCC: Important Steps Forward", *Middle East International*, no.566 (16 January 1998), 15-16.

[418] "U.S. Accuses Iran of Deploying Chemical Weapons on Coast," *Agence France Presse* (22 March 1995), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 14 March 2000].

[419] Cordesman and Hashim, 212.

question of the three islands.[420] Abu Musa, nonetheless, is now a bilateral issue between the states concerned.

Moreover, since its occupation of the islands, Iran has run yearly joint naval exercises in and around the Straits.[421] Finally, in 1999, the GCC states countered Iranian military exercises with some of their own to demonstrate its own show of force—albeit small. The two-week, live-fire exercises were dubbed *Tademun-6* (*Solidarity-6*) maneuvers in early October 1999. [422] General Said al-Abdullah, Qatar's chief of operations, said that each of the six participating GCC states contributed two frigates for the exercise that began on 2 October. The Emirate's UN ambassador, Mohammed bin Hussein al-Shaali, stated that Iranian deployments on Abu Musa show that Tehran "is seeking to transform the island ... into a stationary aircraft carrier, something which endangers the security of the Emirates and the oilfields." Further, the UAE has become alarmed at the growing rapprochement between Iran and some members of the GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia, and has complained that this diplomatic effort undermines its moves to reclaim sovereignty over the disputed and strategic island.[423]

In the meantime, several sources confirm that Iran has built-up a garrison force of at least a battalion and possibly over 1,000 Revolutionary Guards on Abu Musa and the Tunbs.[424] Moreover, they have deployed added artillery and 10 older tanks placed in sheltered positions, stockpiled small caches of CS gas, and created concrete ramps and emplacements useful for anti-ship missiles (ASMs). Further, there are reports that Iran

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[420] Amirahmadi (1994), 66.

[421] Kraska, James. "Iran Flexes Maritime Muscles in Gulf." *Defense News* (4 October 1993), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 20 October 1999].

[422] Blanche, (13 October 1999), Lexis-Nexis.

[423] Ibid.

[424] Prescott, John. "Iran Denies Claims of Weapons Build-up," *Reuters News Service (*24 March 1995) Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 14 March 2000]; Cordesman, Anthony H. "Iran's Strategic Aims and Constraints," in Patrick Clawson, editor, *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*. Washington, D.C.: Institute For National Strategic Studies, 1994), 54; and Cordesman, Anthony H. *Iran's National Security Policy: Intentions, Capabilities and Impact* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 39.

has extended the runway on Abu Musa to the point where it can be used to handle B-727 and B-737 jets, has deployed *Improved HAWK* [425]surface-to-air missiles, and is expanding the port to allow it to base large naval vessels. It has also improved the facilities on Greater Tunb, installed a new generating plant, and deployed additional Naval Guards forces.[426]

3. Today's Iran-UAE Stalemate

In most recent media accounts, the UAE continues to renounce Iran's apparent consolidation of the islands' control. The UAE sent a "memorandum of objection" to Tehran denouncing the Iranian government's opening of a "municipality house in Abu Musa Island."[427] This was followed, a few days later, by an expression of support for the UAE from the Secretary General of the GCC, Sheikh Jamil al-Hujeilan stating:

> The GCC have always asserted in its official meetings' successive statements its backing to the UAE in its legitimate right to restore its three islands—Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa—occupied by Iran.[428]

Further, Hujeilan added "Iran's response to the call of the UAE to settle the dispute over the island(s) will, to a large extent, contribute to strengthening relations the GCC member states always seek to rebuild with Iran."[429] Moreover, the UAE and its

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[425] The HAWK, short for "Homing All the Way Killer," is a medium range, surface-to-air guided missile that provides air defense coverage against low-to-medium-altitude aircraft. It is a mobile, all-weather day and night system. The missile is highly lethal, reliable, and effective against electronic countermeasures. Basic HAWK was developed in the 1950s and initially fielded in 1960. The system has been upgraded through a series of product improvements beginning with the Improved HAWK in 1970. The "Improved" HAWK variant was typically used for export to foreign defense buyers. Iran received its Improved HAWK missiles in the early 1970s, when the Shah was a key US regional ally countering the Soviet Union's designs in the Persian Gulf.

[426] "Iran Has Anti-aircraft Missiles at Gulf Gate," *Agence France Presse* (28 February 1995) Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 January 2000]; and Cordesman, Anthony H. *Iran's Military Forces in Transition.* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 155.

[427] "UAE Voices Strong Objection to Iranian Measures in Abu Musa Island," Internet.

[428] "GCC Supports UAE Over Island Issue," Internet.

[429] Ibid.

GCC allies have not felt immune from punctuating their response with saber rattling of their own; conducting live fire exercises as Iran conducted its own joint naval exercises.[430] Be that as it may, Iranian officials, although quick to offer regrets for the GCC's stated position and reiterate Tehran's desire to continue to improve relations with the GCC states, made it clear that this would "not make a change in the Iranian policy" concerning its territory.[431] In fact, quoting earlier Iranian Foreign Ministry statements concerning this situation, the "three disputed Gulf islands will remain 'Iranian forever.'"[432]

To document their claimed of Iran's hegemonic designs in the Persian Gulf, the US and the GCC point to Iran's annexation of three small islands near the Strait of Hormuz: Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb. Iran and Sharjar (who subsequently joined the UAE) had jointly administered these islands for two decades. Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati, stated Tehran sought Abu Musa as an "exclusive naval base to counterbalance the post-Gulf War defense alliance between the US and the Arab states of the GCC."[433] Concerning the legitimacy of Iran's claim on the islands, Iran's permanent representative to the UN—Kamal Kharrazi explains:

> We have documents that show these islands have been part of Iranian territory for centuries. For years, Britain occupied these islands, but in 1971 they decided to withdraw. Therefore, the Shah sent troops to retake them based on an agreement among the British government, the Iranian government and the emirate of Sharjar. At that time, there was no UAE. The Shah accepted the sovereignty of Bahrain in return for the withdrawal of the British government from the islands. We have an agreement signed in 1971 spelling out how

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[430] Blanche (13 October 1999), Lexis-Nexis.

[431] "Iran Regrets GCC Statement Over UAE Islands," *ArabicNews.com* (1 March 1999), on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed 13 February 2000].

[432] "Iran-UAE Dispute," *ArabicNews.com* (24 December 1997), on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com [Accessed on 23 October 1999].

[433] "Iran's Foreign Minister Speaks on Dispute," Lexis-Nexis.

> the island of Abu Musa is to be governed by Iran and Sharjar. The security of the island has been maintained by Iran since 1971.[434]

Responding to this claim, UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zeid al-Nahayyan replied:

> Let them bring them (the documents) to the International Court of Justice, and we will bring our documents...We will accept any verdict the court issues, whether for or against us. If (the Iranians) refuse arbitration, it means they do not possess sovereignty.[435]

For the purpose of American foreign policy, the practical problem has been determining whether these Iranian actions are defensive or offensive in nature. The Clinton Administration officials have emphasized the aggressive aspects of the Iranian build-up, and the islands have a very geostrategic position. Cordesman observes that:

> The main east-west shipping channels through the Gulf pass within 10-15 kilometers on either side of the Tunbs, as well as the Island of Jazireh-ye Forur, about 50 kilometers to the east. Both the Tunbs and the deeper waters in this part of the Gulf are on the Iranian side of mid-point between Iran and the Southern Gulf, although the Tunbs are not within the 12 mile limit of Iran. Abu Musa is about 40 kilometers south of the smaller Tunb and 25 kilometers south of the east-bound tanker channel—which is the channel that passes to the south of the Tunbs. It is about 50 kilometers southeast of the Iranian Island of Jazireh-yé Sirri. As a result, control of the Tunbs extends Iran's ability to threaten the tanker channels with missiles and hit and run naval raids, while control of Abu Musa ensures that tankers cannot shift to the south without passing equally near to an Iranian controlled island.[436]

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[434] Mattair, Thomas, "Interview with U.N. Ambassador Kamal Kharazi of Iran" (*Middle East Policy*, Winter 1994), 128-129.

[435] Amirahmadi (1996), 78-82.

[436] Cordesman and Hashim, 223.

4. The Strategic Value to Iran

It is important to note, however, that there are limits to the strategic value of these small islands, and that even Abu Musa is difficult to use as a survivable base for naval operations and placement of ASMs in the face of attacks by US airpower.[437] This fact tends to lend credence to Iranian denials of hegemonic intentions. Further, while the three islands do have a strategic position near the main shipping channels in the lower Gulf, Iran has long had ASMs deployed in other positions near the Strait, which could attack any large vessels moving in and out of the Gulf. Iran also possesses bases at Forur and Sirri, and at Qeshem, Hengam, and Larak—islands that are closer to the Strait of Hormuz, larger, and easier to defend. All five of these islands are also capable of staging mining and Naval Guards operations against shipping in the lower Gulf. Iran has reportedly deployed SILKWORM[438] ASMs on Qeshem Island and on Sirri Island near the Strait of Hormuz.[439] These missiles have ranges of up to 90 kilometers.[440] There are reports that Iran has deployed advanced long-range ASMs like the SUNBURST on Sir Island, although US experts have never confirmed such reports.[441]

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[437] Lesser, Ian O. and Tellis, Ashley J. *Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1996), 10; and Cordesman (1994), 118.

[438] Timmerman, Kenneth R. "Iranian Build-up on Channel Islands," *The Iran Brief* (5 January 1999); and Cordesman and Hashim, 223. As a result of a 1988 Iranian-Chinese agreement, Beijing provides Tehran with M-class ballistic missile technology, training for engineers and technicians, equipment and technical assistance in developing the necessary infrastructure for the design, test, and production of these missiles, as well as the Silkworm, and Iran acquired "several dozen" CSS-8 short-range (150 km) ballistic missiles.

[439] Cordesman (1999), 132-133; Alneyadi, Matar J. *Gulf Security and the Iranian Threat.* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: U. S. Army War College, 1998), 23; and Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. "Iran Strives to Regain Military Might: Rearmament Drive Aims to Restore Gulf Balance," *International Defense Review* 29 (1 July 1996) Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 21 October 1999] For information on Chinese proliferation of SILKWORM technology see Gates, Robert, Director of Central Intelligence. *Hearing of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, Weapons Proliferation in the New World Order* (Washington, D.C.: US Congress, 15 January 1992); and *Los Angeles Times, Washington Edition* (3 April 1992), 7, Lexis Nexis [Accessed on 21 November 2000].

[440] Cullen, Tony and Foss, Christopher F. editors, *Jane's Land-Based Missile Defense: 1997-98.Tenth Edition.*(Alexandria, Virginia: Jane's Information Group, 1997), 373.

[441] Cordesman (1999), 134; "Israel Protested The Sale Of Eight SS-N-22 SUNBURST [Sunburn] Anti-Ship Supersonic (Mach 2.5) Cruise Missiles To Iran By Ukraine," *Agence France-Presse International News* (14 May 1995) on the internet at http://csf.colorado.edu/dfax/matn/matn9508.htm [Accessed 22 November 2000]; and Blanche, Ed. "Israel Objects to Russia Missile Sales to Iran," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (12 March 1997), 6. The SUNBURST is basically the SS-N-22 SUNBURN ASM developed by the Soviet Union and fielded in the 1980s. It was used on SOVREMENNYY-class destroyers and on TARANTUL

So far, Iran has not used the islands to take any aggressive actions in the Gulf. Iran, however, did act at a time when it claimed it was trying to improve its relations with the Southern Gulf states. Why? Well, this again is indicative of the primacy of neorealist thinking in Iran's national security decision making. The Strait of Hormuz is a central national security concern for Iran in several respects. First, the Strait is *the* lifeline for Iran's economy. Linked to Iran's economic survival is its ability to keep the Strait of Hormuz open because of its high dependence on oil exports. In contrast, both Iraq and Saudi Arabia are equally dependent on oil exports but they have alternative routes to ship their supply—through Turkey and the Red Sea, respectively. Second, the Strait is the main access avenue for Iran's number one security concern in the Gulf—the US military. Specifically for Iran, as it relates to the Strait, is the power projection afforded the US through its carrier battle groups, carrying strike aircraft, cruise missiles, and Aegis cruisers. The lessons of the Gulf War were not lost on Iran. Thus, Iran took action to ensure achievement of its primary national security concerns, despite the ramifications they would bring upon its other foreign policy goals in the region. This is the epitome of neorealist behavior in a state.

In like fashion, some Middle East experts see Iran's actions as a reflection of a continuing conflict between the influence of pragmatists and extremists in the Iranian government;[442] although Rafsanjani visited Abu Musa shortly before the seizure and almost certainly approved every step Iran has taken regarding the islands. In fact, the Iranian action in Abu Musa must be seen from a nationalist perspective and as one that has broad popular support in Iran. But, the US and GCC countries fear once Iran, which has been on a heavy rearmament spending spree for some years now, rearms itself it intends to intimidate its smaller GCC neighbors and become the regional hegemonic

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[Tarantula] III patrol craft and reaches speeds upward of Mach 3. After the Soviet break-up, Ukraine redesignated the ASM as SUNBURST and sold at least eight to Iran for a price of $450,000 per missile, after an arms dealer had failed to broker a deal for the US to buy them.

[442] Maclear, 25; Clawson, Patrick. editor. "Alternative Foreign Policy Views Among the Iranian Policy Elite," in *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities* (Washington, D.C.: Institute For National Strategic Studies, 1994), 45; and Alaolmolki, Nozar. "The New Iranian Left," *Middle East Journal,* 41, No. 2 (Spring 1987), 221.

power in the Persian Gulf.[443] Rearmament aside, Iran's sheer size in and of itself has a very intimidating effect on its Arab neighbors. With an estimated population of over 60 million, Iran has more people than Iraq and the GCC put together. James Bill, speaking to a conference on US-Iran relations, puts into perspective the US-GCC concerns regarding Iran:

> The very size of this country makes its smaller neighbors nervous. And its loud and sometimes threatening voice does not inspire confidence among its weaker, softly obese, hugely rich neighbors. These jittery neighbors, therefore, are happy to have the support of a world class giant (in the US) that can be called in whenever they feel threatened.[444]

5. Review of Relations

In sum, Iran's national security posture with regard to the disputed islands demonstrate again the correctness of Waltz and the rational camp of theorists which support neorealist theory in international relations models. Iran's decision to forgo amiable relations with the UAE and its GCC partners to seek protection of its territorial claims and its economic lifeline embodied by the Strait of Hormuz illustrates this. Iranian economy, although somewhat diversified, is still largely hinges upon the sale of its most abundant resource—oil. This waterway is also *the* choke point of the United States naval access to the Persian Gulf. With its awesome power projection capabilities relative to Iran, the US, and specifically the US Navy, is seen as *the* threat to Iran's economic link. Therefore, these islands help Iran posture to achieve its long-term national security objectives of protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the nations economic future.

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[443] This is discussed at length in Ahrari (1993), Nardulli (1994) and Arnett (1997).

[444] Amirahmadi, Hooshang and James Bill, ed., "The Clinton Administration and the Future of US-Iran Relations," *Policy Report of the Middle East Insight*, no. 3 (Washington, D.C.: International Insight, Inc. and the US-Iran Conference, 1993): 6.

C. IRAN & BAHRAIN RELATIONS

Interrelated with Iran's claim over Abu Musa and the Tunb islands is the Iranian territorial claim upon the small Gulf island nation of Bahrain. Bahrain is the only country in the GCC with a majority Shi'ite population—though politically in the minority. Furthermore, Bahrain is the only country in which Iran has periodically claimed sovereignty as its 14th province, with claims dating back to the 6th century Persian Sassanid Empire and persisting intermittently up until 1971.[445] After the establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran in 1979, new threats to Bahrain's ruling elite manifested themselves in uncovered coup plots and general unrest among Bahrain's majority Shi'a population.[446] The following discourse will review the highlights of these events and put them in perspective neorealist policy choices made by Tehran at different points to balance power against Iran's primary threat in the Gulf, namely the United States.

1. Iran Empathy with the Shi'a of Bahrain

Iranian maps often showed Bahrain as part of Iran and the Iranian Majlis even passed laws applying to Bahrain—although they had no power or effect.[447] During the 1960s, after a long silence on the matter, the Shah of Iran strongly reasserted Iran's claim to Bahrain in an official note to the British government in early 1968—shortly after Britain had announced that it would leave the Gulf.[448] This, in turn, led to negotiations between Iran and Britain, resulting in an agreement late in 1969 to refer the issue to the UN Secretary General. In turn, the UN would appoint a mission of inquiry to determine the wishes of the people of Bahrain. It was clear that this agreement would lead to Bahrain's independence under the Al Khalifas, but it served the Shah's interests by making it increasingly unlikely that Britain could unite Bahrain into the federation of

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[445] Savory, Roger. *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 198; and Amirahmadi (1994), 28. For example, Shah Reza made claims to Bahrain when he came to power in World War II and Iran protested Britain's transfer of its political agent in the Gulf from Bushehr to Bahrain when this took place in 1946. When the Shah surrendered Iran's claims in favor of gaining the small islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs', discussed in Chapter VII of this paper.

[446] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 65.

[447] Ibid., 66.

[448] Tarock (1999), 90.

Emirates that would bring together most of the smaller states in the Southern Gulf. In addition, the Shah did not challenge Bahrain's sovereignty after the UN decided in favor of independence in 1970.[449] In 1979, however, the Shah's fall and the rise of Khomeini created a new radical group that could appeal to Bahrain's Shi'ite majority, many of whose clergy trained in Iran.[450] This, coupled with the many Iranian residents in Bahrain, gave the radicals in Tehran a natural conduit for influence.

Shortly after Khomeini's rise to power in 1979, he stated that Bahrain was part of Iran.[451] He also sent "messengers" to Bahrain to promote Iran's religious revolution. This led to riots in Bahrain as early as August 1979—when some 1,500 Shi'ite demonstrators rallied in favor of the Iranian revolution.[452] As a result, Bahrain's security forces arrested many of the demonstrators, exiled some, and expelled at least one pro-Iranian Sheik, as well as several members of the Shi'ite clergy.[453] Further Shi'ite protests, including some violent demonstrations against the US presence in Bahrain, occurred at the time of the student seizure of the US embassy in Tehran.[454]

Meanwhile, Khomeini's mantra of Iran's destiny to export the Islamic revolution to other states did not sit well with Bahrain's ruling elite. These developments helped make Manama a strong supporter of Iraq at the start of the Iran-Iraq War, allowing Iraq to disperse some of its aircraft in Bahrain.[455] Further, the Al Khalifa family made it clear that it supported Iraq's initial victory claims. This led to new Shi'ite protests in April

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[449] Akhavi, Shahrough. *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy- State Relations in the Pahlavi Period (*Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 35.

[450] Bahgat, Gawdat. *The Persian Gulf at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1999), 67; and Cordesman (1997), 74.

[451] Tarock (1999), 88.

[452] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 70.

[453] Kostiner, Joseph. "Shi'i Unrest in the Gulf," in Martin Kramer, editor, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 174-5.

[454] Bahgat, 112.

[455] Tarock (1999), 94.

1980, in which Bahrain's security forces arrested at least 50 Shi'ite leaders, forcing them to organize a new structure designed to control and infiltrate Shi'ite opposition. At the same time, Iran began actively to provide funds, training, and arms for its supporters in Bahrain.[456]

The tensions between Bahrain and Iran reached a crisis point in mid-December, 1981. During this time Bahrain's government arrested 73 people, including 58 Bahraini nationals, 13 Saudis, one Kuwaiti, and one Omani, and eventually deported up to 300 others, all members of a Shi'ite group called the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, who had planned a coup for Bahrain's national day on 16 December 1980.[457] Many had trained in Iran and had smuggled in arms, men, and some $120,000 in cash from Iran.[458] The group had obtained Bahraini police uniforms and planned to assassinate key members of the Al Khalifa family and government officials. They intended to declare an Islamic republic when their leader arrived from Iran. "The plot was discovered by an immigration official in Dubai who noted suspicious movements from Iran to Bahrain. Bahraini security officials then discovered that the Iranian charge d'affaires in Manama was both importing equipment, like walkie-talkies, from London in his diplomatic pouch and funding the group."[459] Another 13 members of the group were found to be operating in Saudi Arabia and others in the UAE. Despite the fact that the group received considerable support in the Diraz and Awali districts of Baharian, no public protests resulted from the arrest of the group's members. The group had some 150-200 guerrillas training in Iran[460] and had ties to Hadi al-Modarasi; a Shi'ite mullah who had lived in exile in Bahrain while the Shah was in power.[461]

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[456] Ibid.

[457] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 71.

[458] Ibid., 71.

[459] Bahgat, 79.

[460] Ibid., 80.

[461] Hadi al-Modarasi subsequently became the head of the Gulf Affairs Section of Iran's Revolutionary Guards after this episode.

These discoveries led Bahrain to be cautious in dealing with those it arrested for the coup attempt. Any signs of public demonstrations were carefully suppressed. [462] Rather than arresting them, the government expelled another 200-300 Shi'ites and kept new arrests that it made in 1983 a secret.[463] Bahrain also made a major effort to expand economic opportunities for Shi'ites, while it increased efforts to penetrate every Shi'ite group and cell. These government efforts largely contained violent protests and pro-Iranian actions, although low-level sabotage and occasional incidents continued until the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988.[464]

It was this history between these two countries that drew immediate suspicion from Bahrain officials. They believed Iran was somehow behind the 1994 Shi'ite rioting—unrest that continues to rumble within Bahrain's Shi'a community to this day. Baharaini officials believe that Iran has actively supported the present Shi'ite unrest in Bahrain, and has active ties to a number of the more extreme Shi'ite clerics and members of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain that have helped trigger demonstrations and riots. Bahrain also expelled an Iranian diplomat, Third Secretary Abdul-Rasool Dokoohki, for "activities incompatible with his diplomatic status" in early February 1996.[465] They also arrested forty-four Bahraini Shi'ites on 3 June 1996 for plotting to overthrow the government. Bahrain indicated that many of those arrested had at least some political ties to Iran, receiving training in Iranian-funded camps in Lebanon, Iran, or Afghanistan.[466]

The Bahraini leadership certainly felt this was the case in 1994 when, in December of that year, arresting a leading Baharini Shi'ite leader upon his return from

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[462] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 72.

[463] Ibid., 74.

[464] Karsh, 76.

[465] Ibid., 178.

[466] "Iran Accused of Unrest in Bahrain," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (28 February 1996), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 21 May 2000].

Iran.[467] This lead to unprecedented rioting by members of the Shi'ite community and resulted in Bahrain recalling its ambassador from Tehran.[468] A statement by the Bahraini Interior Ministry said "that the incidents were accompanied by an organized foreign media and propaganda campaign. Moreover, Iran spread some misleading rumors to increase tension and escalate the situation."[469] Iran's state-run radio said anti-government protests in Bahrain will "continue unless democratic reforms are introduced and social corruption is stopped." The radio also accused Bahrain's Sunni dominated regime of encouraging immigration in "an apparent attempt to decrease the large proportion of Shi'ites in the population."[470] A letter to the British press by the Bahraini Ambassador to Britain, further implied Iran's culpability: "During December Bahrain experienced a wave of unrest deliberately provoked and supported by foreign-based terrorists bent on destabilizing the Gulf region."[471] The implications were clear that Bahrain felt Iran was behind the rioting and the fact it took place two weeks before the holding of the GCC conference in Bahrain was seen as an attempt to unsettle the GCC countries. Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati did little to allay these fears, stating, during an address to the Forty-Ninth Session of the United Nations General Assembly that: "The Islamic Republic of Iran, possessing the longest shoreline along the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, has been well aware of its role and responsibilities in promoting and maintaining peace and security in the area, and has spared no effort in this regard."[472]

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[467] Bruce, James. "Iran's Military Build-up in Gulf Alarms GCC," Lexis-Nexis; Bruce, James. "Foiled Coup was Iran-Backed, Says Bahrain," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (12 June 1996), Lexis-Nexis Nexis [Accessed on 12 April 2000]; "Iran Accused of Unrest in Bahrain,"Lexis-Nexis; "Blaming Iran," *The Economist*, vol. 339, no. 7970 (London: 15 June 1996), Lexis- Nexis [Accessed on 12 April 2000]; and "Bahrain: Spot the Villain," *The Economist*, vol. 338, no. 7951 (London: 3 February 1996), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 12 April 2000].

[468] "Police Use Tear-gas, Rubber Bullets on Demonstrators," *Paris AFP in English*, (6 January in FBIS-NES-95-005, 9 January 1995), 26.

[469] "Ties with Iran said 'Soured' Over Internal Incidents," *Cairo Arab Republic of Egypt in Arabic*, (23 December in FBIS-NES-94-248, 27 December 1994), 21.

[470] "Iran Blames Lack of Democracy for Bahrain Unrest," *Reuter (Nicosia)*, 16 January 1995: 1.

[471] "Envoy Questions reports by Human Rights Group," *London The Times, in English*, (18 January in FBIS-NES-95-012, 19 January 1995), 27-28.

[472] Velayati, Ali Akbar, Foreign Minister, Islamic Republic of Iran. "Speech to the United Nations General Assembly," *Vital Speeches of the Day* (March 1995), 21.

Today, Iran seems to have reduced its support of radical groups in Bahrain during the period immediately after the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the death of Khomeini. Anti-government Shi'ite activity in Bahrain was also limited during the Gulf War. Since 1992, however, Bahrain has experienced growing economic problems, which have led to serious internal unrest among Bahrain's Shi'ites.[473] Iranian-trained, Bahraini Shi'ite clergy and students, many of whom were educated in Qom, have supported some of this unrest. Iran also continues to permit the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain to maintain an office in Tehran, and may be providing substantial funds to the group's main office in London—the location of most other Bahraini exile organizations. Still, Bahrain has not "warmed" considerably to recent Iranian gestures of neighborly love. Manama's monarch still finds comfort in the US military presence as evidenced by its welcome of Washington's proposal to emplace a missile defense system in the region and the basing of a new squadron of US F-16 jet fighters by the end of 2000.[474] The New York Times quoted Bahrain's Crown Prince Shaykh Hamad bin 'Isa, who joked to a senior US official: "In Iran you have three people in charge: you have Khamenei, who is in charge of religion and terrorism. You have Rafsanjani, and he is in charge of business and terrorism. And then you have Khatami, and he is in charge of internal politics, moderation and terrorism."[475]

2. Fears of a Pro-Iranian "Fifth Column"

The concern of Bahrain officials mirror those of other GCC member countries which express differing views about the threat Iran poses in terms of its support for other Shi'ite and Islamic fundamentalist movements in the Gulf area. Some officials feel that

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[473] "Blaming Iran," *The Economist*, Lexis-Nexis.

[474] STRATFOR. "Middle East and Africa News Briefs," based on reports from *Bahrain Tribune (English)* (2 May 2000) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/meaf/news/000502.htm [Accessed on 20 May 2000].

[475] Sciolino, Elaine. "The World: America Frets as Its Chums Pay Their Own Games; Saudis Make Nice With The Irani," *New York Time (*12 April 1998), on the internet at http://archives.nytimes.com/ archives/ search/fastweb?search [Accessed 21 April 2000].

Iran has set up intelligence and surveillance networks in all the southern Gulf states, at least penetrating many of the Islamic extremist movements there, although their level of control is questionable. As well, they feel that Iran has actively surveyed potential targets for military or terrorist action, such as critical oil facilities, power plants, communications centers, and desalinization plants. Ultimately all their concerns are based on the unnerving perception that Iran has a potential *fifth column* element within each GCC Shi'a community.[476] To illustrate, the UAE has upward of nearly 100,000 Iranians with a continual flow of dhow traffic between Iran and the UAE, affording potential Shi'ite revolutionaries a perfect clandestine communications conduit.[477] Although not as large as Bahrain's Shi'a community, about 16 percent of the UAE's population is Shi'ite and UAE security officials are concerned of the potential problems posed by Iran's claims over the Gulf around Abu Musa and the Tunbs.[478]

It is worth noting here that Bahrain is not alone in its concerns about the Shi'a comprising an Iranian "fifth column" element within their borders. Other GCC states share their concerns. For example, Iran has often spouted hostile rhetoric directed toward to Saudi Arabia, and Iran's media and some of its political leaders have vigorously attacked the Saudi royal family, causing repeated riots and other problems during the Hajj. Some Saudi officials feel that Iran has also provided training, funds, and possibly arms for Shi'ite minorities in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Furthermore, they believe that Iran is indirectly encouraging Sunni extremist movements that would not otherwise support Iran's Shi'ite faith, or show any interest in dealing with Persian led movements. Similarly, Iran has reportedly maintained a robust intelligence network in Kuwait since the Iran-Iraq War—a war in which Kuwait supported Iraq. During that war it supported and encouraged Kuwaiti Shi'ites and Iranian expatriates in numerous bombings, sabotage, and assassination attempts. Kuwait has made repeated efforts to destroy these networks, expelling or imprisoning many of those it believes has ties to

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[476] Cordesman and Hashim: 298.

[477] Ibid., 298.

[478] Ibid., 298; and Cordesman (1997): 10

Iran. Although Iran has been much less hostile to Kuwait since 1989, it seems likely that it retains significant intelligence links to Shi'ite groups in Kuwait.

Given this background, it is not surprising that many Gulf States have adopted a *dual-track* diplomacy with Iran. On the one hand, they have maintained a dialogue with Iran, maintained relations, and attempted to expand trade and encourage Iran's moderates. On the other hand, they have strengthened their military forces and ties to the US and used forums like the GCC to condemn Iran.[479] The Foreign Ministers of the GCC provided a particularly strong condemnation of Iran at the meeting on 2 June 1996.[480] This condemnation came only days before Bahrain announced that it had made 44 arrests to block an Iranian supported conspiracy.[481]

3. Iranian Policy Logic vis-à-vis Bahrain

In a neorealist context, Iran's actions benefit one of its primary national security policy goals in the dislodgment of US military forces from the Persian Gulf region. Bahrain is home to several crucial US commands and bases, most importantly that of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet Headquarters. By backing a potentially successful coup in 1981, Iran was causing almost fatal trouble to an Iraqi ally during the Iran-Iraq War and creating a potential crisis for US forces in the region. If the 1981 coup were successful, a pro-Iranian government might well discontinue US basing rights. Therefore, in this respect the decision to fund the coup plan, despite the "blowback"[482], was logical and fitting within Iran's overall national security policy scheme. Tehran denies that the 1994

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[479] Olson, William J., ed., *US Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 51; and Ahrari and Noyes, 213.

[480] Bahrain's Foreign Minister condemned Iran for interfering "in the internal affairs of Bahrain and other member countries," and for "repeated measures" concerning the strategic Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. They urged Iran "not to resort (to) or encourage acts of sabotage, and to respect the sovereignty and independence of council states." They condemned Iran for seeking to develop an arsenal that "exceeds its ordinary and legitimate defense needs."

[481] "Bahrain: Spot the Villain," Lexis-Nexis.

[482] "Blowback" is an intelligence term used to describe the effects of mostly covert actions which, although designed to give "plausible deniability to the nation backing the action, are linked to the backing nation causing undesired public relations and diplomatic repercussions.

Shi'ite uprising in Bahrain was supported by the Iranian government; however, the extent of involvement by the extra-governmental *bonyards*[483] remains unknown. Regardless, from a neorealist perspective it still fits within Iran's desire to create divisions in Arab nations, which support US forces in the region. Today, in 2000, Tehran appears to have taken a new policy tack, which focuses on greatly allaying the fears of its Gulf neighbors to create a wedge between the US and the Arabs whose domestic populations resent American military presence. In this framework, covert operations to support Shi'a uprisings like those of 1981 and 1994 would not be beneficial to the government's international policy goals.

The unique situation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its separate *'ulama'* power base and the *bonyards* deflect a firm statement in this regard. If the radical elements fear they are losing hold of power with the moderate factions, dark international incidents which highlight Iran as the "rogue state" might isolate the moderates and keep the radicals in power. From this perspective, future Iranian instigation of Bahrain's Shi'a community might be the "pragmatic choice" for the radical Iranian clerical establishment, as they perceive the integrity of the revolution and their hold on power threatened with extinction. A classic neorealist response—"survival of the state."

4. Review of Relations

In sum, government officials in Bahrain feel Iran directly encouraged protests and violence to precipitate broad social revolution, and they fear that Iran may take more direct subversive or military action if the situation in Bahrain continues to deteriorate. Moreover, they are concerned that Iran has used its theological schools to radicalize the Bahrain Shi'ite clergy that train there, that Iran seems to have trained cadres in revolutionary techniques, and that Iran may try to exploit the possible threat posed by this pro-Iranian "Fifth Column" living in Bahrain to the detriment of the ruling minority in

[483] The *bonyards,* or Islamic foundations, are under the control of the fundamentalist clerical establishment with vast financial holdings. They are purported to be the source of funding for many of the Islamist groups still operating worldwide. Not under any control or oversight by the democratic government, these foundations form a duality in Iranian political understanding—literally a Janus-face to Iranian policy making.

Manama.[484] On the other hand, in recent years Iran appears to have forsaken its revolutionary and ideological support for Bahraini Shi'as in favor of the more pragmatic goals of improving relations with its Gulf neighbors (like Bahrain) to meet its long-range strategic agenda. More evidence of Iranian neorealism in policy making.

D. IRAN & OMAN RELATIONS

Iran's relations with Oman have been equally complex and, throughout the early and mid-1980s, have been characterized by alternating periods of tension and mutual accommodation.[485] For example, immediately after the Revolution, Iranian propaganda singled out the sultan of Oman as an example of the kind of "un-Islamic tyrant" who should be overthrown. This hostility sprang from the revolutionaries' perception of the Omani ruler as having been a close friend of the Shah. Iran's view had developed in the 1970s when the shah sent military assistance, including an Iranian military contingent, to help the sultan crush a long-term rebellion.[486] More significant, however, the Iranian leaders regarded the sultan as subservient to the US. They denounced his policies of supporting the Camp David accords, providing facilities for American aircrews that attempted the unsuccessful rescue of the hostages in April 1980, signing an agreement for American military use of the air base on Masirah Island, and discussing with the US construction of an airfield on the Musandam Peninsula overlooking the Strait of Hormuz.[487] Oman generally refrained from responding to Iranian charges and consequently avoided an escalation of the verbal barrages. Despite the many areas of friction, tensions between Iran and Oman gradually abated after 1981.[488]

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[484] "Iran Accused of Unrest in Bahrain," Lexis-Nexis.

[485] United States Library of Congress, *Iran,* Internet.

[486] Ibid.

[487] Metz, Helen Chapin, editor. *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1994), 88.

[488] Ibid. In fact, the only real strain in Iran-Oman relations developed when Iran began its attacks on tanker movements in the gulf and Iran's provocative emplacement of Chinese Silkworm antiship missile launchers on the banks of the Strait of Hormuz. In response, the Omani sultanate reinforced its military position on the Musandam Peninsula, which is only about 60 kilometers from Iranian territory. This episode aside, the fact the diplomatic waters between the two nations has been undisturbed has provided Iran with an open vehicle to showcase its new foreign policy strategy to the other GCC states.

The movement toward more correct diplomatic relations culminated in 1987 with a state visit of the Omani foreign minister to Iran. Because of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's providing major financial support to Iraq after the Iran-Iraq War began, relations grew strained with Tehran.[489] In addition, Iran accused them of providing logistical assistance for Iraqi bombing raids on Iranian oil installations. For their part, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait believed that Iran supported subversive activities among their Shi'a minorities. They also resented Iranian attacks on their shipping. Saudi Arabia annually confronted embarrassing incidents during the pilgrimage season when Iranians tried to stage political demonstrations. [490] Since Khomeini's death in 1989, Oman's relations with Iran have been the strongest of any of the GCC countries. Omani officials have spoken out often against the US policy of isolating Iran, saying that dialogue was preferable. Foreign Minister Yusuf bin 'Alawi went so far as to state that Iran's isolation jeopardized Gulf security.[491] Cooperation continues between the navies of the two countries.[492]

1. Omani Security Perceptions

Oman's openness to Iranian gestures is rooted in Muscat's own security concerns, both internal and external. Both before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Oman has found Iran to be a willing neighbor to assist in offsetting Oman's security needs. For instance, kindled by Nasser's rabid Arab nationalism which was igniting the entire Middle East in the 1960s, a rebellion broke out in 1964 in Dhofar—one of the most backward and exploited area of Oman.[493] Although begun as a tribal separatist movement against a reactionary ruler, the rebellion was backed by leftist elements in the

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[489] Chubin, Shahram. and Tripp, Charles. *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order.* Adelphi Paper 304 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

[490] "Iran: Relations with Regional Powers," Lexis-Nexis.

[491] *Reuters,* 6 (28 May 1996), Lexis-Nexis.

[492] See, for example, *Iranian Republic News Agency (IRNA),* 9 October 1996 (DR).

[493] Metz, *Persian Gulf States,* 91.

Soviet Union's client-state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).[494] Its original aim was the overthrow of Said ibn Taimur, but, by 1967, under the name of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf—changed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) in 1974—it adopted much wider goals.[495] Supported by the Soviet Union through the PDRY, it hoped to spread revolution throughout the conservative regimes of the Arabian Peninsula.[496] Unfortunately, the reprisals of Said ibn Taimur's against the Dhofari people did not break them but instead drove them into the rebel camp. In 1970, as the Dhofari guerrilla attacks expanded, Said ibn Taimur's son, Qaboos ibn Said Al Said, replaced his father in a coup carried out with the assistance of British officers. Then Qaboos ibn Said, a Sandhurst graduate and veteran of British army service, began a program to modernize the country and to develop the armed forces. In addition to British troops and advisers, the new sultan was assisted with troops sent by the Shah of Iran.[497] An Iranian brigade, along with artillery and helicopters, arrived in Dhofar in 1973. After the arrival of the Iranians, the combined forces consolidated their positions on the coastal plain and moved against the guerrillas' mountain stronghold and, by stages; the Omanis and Iranians gradually subdued the guerrilla forces, pressing their remnants closer and closer to the PDRY border. Oman's sultan finally declared victory over the rebels in December 1975.[498]

Another example is that of territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A particularly long and acrimonious disagreement involved claims over the Al Buraymi Oasis, disputed since the 19th century among tribes from Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi (eventually becoming part of the UAE), and Oman, erupted in the 1950s.[499] Although the

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[494] Ibid.

[495] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 115.

[496] Ibid., 116.

[497] Aid also came from India, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Trucial Coast, all interested in ensuring that Oman did not become a "people's republic."

[498] United States Library of Congress, *Iran*, Internet.

[499] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 119.

tribes residing in the several settlements of the oasis were from Oman and Abu Dhabi, followers of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi religious movement had periodically occupied and exacted tribute from the area. Oil prospecting began on behalf of Saudi oil interests, and in 1952 the Saudis sent a small constabulary force to assert control of the oasis. When arbitration efforts broke down in 1955, the British dispatched the Trucial Oman Scouts to expel the Saudi contingent.[500] After a new round of negotiations, Saudi Arabia finally recognized the claims of Abu Dhabi and Oman to the oasis. In return for this concession, Abu Dhabi agreed to grant Saudi Arabia a land corridor to the gulf and a share of a disputed oil field; however, other disagreements over boundaries and water rights remain.[501]

Today, Oman's perceptions of the strategic problems in the gulf diverge somewhat from those of the other Arab Gulf States. Geographically, it faces outward to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and only a few kilometers of its territory—the western coast of the Musandam Peninsula—border the Persian Gulf.[502] Nevertheless, sharing the guardianship of the Strait of Hormuz with Iran, Oman's position makes it of key importance to the security of the entire gulf. As an example of its independent thought, Oman has shown a willingness to enter into strategic cooperation with nations like the US and the United Kingdom, which has often put it at odds with its GCC neighbors.[503]

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[500] United States Library of Congress, *Oman,* Internet.

[501] Ibid.

[502] Ibid.

[503] Ibid..; and "Omani Role in the Persian Gulf War, 1991" on the internet at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/ cstdy:@field(DOCID+om0091) [Accessed 23 April 2000]. In 1980 Muscat and Washington concluded a ten-year "facilities access" agreement granting the United States limited access to the air bases on Masirah and at Thamarit and As Sib and to the naval bases at Muscat, Salalah, and Al Khasab. The agreement was renewed for a further ten-year period in December 1990. Although some Arab governments initially expressed their disapproval for granting the United States basing privileges, the agreement permitted use of these bases only on advance notice and for specified purposes. Likewise, during the Iran-Iraq War, the United States flew maritime patrols from Omani airfields and based tanker aircraft to refuel United States carrier aircraft.

Therefore, despite Iran's label as a "rogue" and "pariah" state, Oman has shown a willingness to play the GCC-contrarian by keeping diplomatic avenues open with Tehran. In part, because of past good relations and part, for Oman to balance against what it perceives as its potential national security threats—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen.[504] As I have shown here, Oman has had past territorial disputes all of these countries, which continue quietly as, unresolved at different levels. Meanwhile, Iran shows nothing but a willingness to develop a closer friendship with Muscat—much to the chagrin of Washington defense and foreign policy makers.

2. Iran and Oman: The Evolving Relationship

Iran's pragmatic policies of the 1990s have sought to cultivate and evolve its relations with Oman. Oman is a vital nation to Iranian security planning. Iran is only the northern gatekeeper to the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz. The southern gatekeeper is Oman. With its long coastline on the southern edge of the Gulf of Oman approaches to the strait and its territory on the southern "gate" of the Strait itself, Muscat is a very necessary ally in Iran's national security strategy to ensure a force hostile to Iran does not interdict the Strait of Hormuz. As has been mentioned before, this geostrategic chokepoint is of the utmost importance to Iranian economic survival. Being on friendly terms with Oman allows at the very least a regional nation, which would likely choose neutrality in a conflict directed at Iran. Furthermore, it segways neatly with Iran's evolving policy in the 1990s of regional engagement. This new policy appears to be directed mainly toward elevating itself from the US-imposed regime of economic sanctions, fostering good feelings amongst its Arab neighbors, and ultimately, forcing a wedge between the US and our allies in the Gulf who might eventually deny hosting of US military bases and the like to appease their disgruntled population.

To illustrate, Tehran has made much progress in realizing its goal of creating a regional security framework by warming ties with Saudi Arabia and other GCC states. In fact, these ties have improved so much that Saudi Arabia sided with Iran in the territorial

[504] Ibid.

dispute between Iran and the UAE over the three small, disputed islands in the Strait of Hormuz. This issue was the center of debate at the last GCC summit and threatened to cause a rift in the GCC.[505] Yet, members of the GCC (other than the UAE) have solidified support for increased Iranian involvement in the region since the election of Iranian President Mohammed Khatami due to the lack of a coherent US policy in the region. Increased US distraction from the region has added to the desire of GCC members to work together.[506]

Moreover, as it concerns Iran-Oman relations, starting in the early 1990s, Oman and Iran signed a series of agreements that allowed Iran to emerge from the international and regional isolation it had experienced in the 1980s. The first agreements were nothing more than small agricultural and construction agreements,[507] but they allowed the nurturing of closer relationships which have created a level of concern to policy makers in Washington.[508] This included senior governmental talks in 1998 and later plans for military exercises.

In 1998, Speaker of the Omani Shoura council Abdullah Bin Ali al-Qutbi met with Chairman of the Iranian Shoura council Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri and members of the accompanying delegation in Muscat on 27 April. It was a cordial gathering, which stressed the good relations between the two Shoura councils and underlined the importance of boosting these relations for the betterment of both countries. Nouri also met with Oman's ministers of foreign affairs, defense, trade and industry, exchanging

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[505] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 151.

[506] Tarock (1999), 96.

[507] "Iran-Oman Cooperation," *Aracicnews.com* (4 March 1999) on the internet at http://www.iraniantrade.org/_NewsUpdates/0000006f.htm [Accessed 29 March 2000]; "Iran, Oman To Sign Communication Agreement," *Arabicnews.com* (28 April 1993) on the internet at <http://www.netiran.com/Htdocs/ DailyNews/Archive/IRNA/1993/930428IRGG03.html> [Accessed on 29 March 2000].

[508] Corless, Josh, "Iran to Fortify Cross-Strait Relations," *Jane's Navy International*, vol. 108, no. 8 (1 October 1999), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 23 October 1999].; and STRATFOR " Iran-Oman Naval Exercises are Sign of Regional Security Cooperation," (8 September 1999) on the internet at <http://www.stratfor.com/MEAF/commentary/ m9909082200.htm [Accessed on 29 March 2000].

views on issues of mutual interests.[509] This was followed that same year with the governments of Iran and Oman agreeing to cooperate in the military arena, especially the exchange of military experts to supervise their maneuvers and the establishment of "a friendship military committee" to "strengthen bilateral cooperation" in the area of defense. Afterward, Iranian Defense Minister Admiral Ali Shamkhani expressed hope that Iranian—Omani military cooperation would become an example for other countries in the region; a not so subtle hint to the other, less enthusiastic, GCC states.[510] Additionally, in yet another example of the evolution of Iran-Oman relations, the official Oman News Agency reported that Iranian President Khatami was invited Oman's Sultan Qaboos to visit the Islamic Republic in January 2000.[511]

Even more ominous for US policy makers were the 1999 press accounts which reported that the Iranian and Omani navies are working on plans for joint naval exercises to be held in the Persian Gulf as part of a continuing campaign of politico-military rapprochement between Tehran and its GCC counterparts.[512] Iran's relationship with Oman has been a vital component in Iran's policy goals of securing the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz—control of which remains a pillar of Iranian foreign and military policy. In fact, "relations between the two navies received a boost last December when Omani personnel were invited to be observers during Iranian exercises in the

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[509] "Oman, Iran Hold Parliamentary Talks" *Arabicnews.com* (27 April 1998) on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980427/1998042724.html [Accessed on 29 March 2000].

[510] "Military Cooperation Between Iran, Oman," *Arabicnews.com* (17 November 1998) on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/981117/1998111715.html [Accessed on 29 March 2000].; and "Iran, Oman Sign Memorandum Of Understanding, Cooperation" *Arabicnews.com* (24 December 1998) on the internet at http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/981224/1998122411.html [Accessed on 29 March 2000].

[511] "Oman's Leader Invited To Visit Iran," *Arabicnews.com* (23 January 2000) on the internet at http://news.arabia.com/article/0,1690,News-11625,00.html [Accessed on 29 March 2000].

[512] Tarock (1999): 135.

Persian Gulf."[513] Oman, which lies approximately 100km to the south of Bandar Abbas, sponsored reciprocal exchanges with Iran's naval headquarters.[514]

These examples of Iran-Oman initiatives demonstrate a steady pattern of openness and cooperation which will likely pay dividends for Iran in the long-term regardless of its motivation—be it true gestures of friendship or calculated policy strategy. Iran seeks to exploit the erosion of US support in the region—a product of a failed policy concerning Iraq and domestic Arab unrest—to begin to leverage itself out of its "pariah" status with its Gulf neighbors and possibly see America, its largest regional threat, lose its future geostrategic footing. Thus, we see these initiatives by Iran as neorealist pragmatism (potentially) serving the long-term national security goals of the regime. Motivated by the desire to offset American presence in the Gulf, Iran initiated its largely successful *charm offensive* with its Arab neighbors. By aligning itself with US-allied GCC states, using Oman as an entrée, Tehran's overtures may gradually undermine the balance of power in the region. Tehran maintains that international co-operation and participation in military exercises will help overcome the 'inappropriate' perception that Iran is working against regional peace and stability.

3. Review of Relations

In sum, Iran has been very perceptive in developing its relations with Oman to this point. First, Oman helped Iran penetrate the façade of unity surrounding the GCC, providing Tehran with more in-roads to the other members through which it hopes to sway their support away from extra-regional partners like the United States. Second, Iran-Oman relations have served to erode support for the UAE's continued diplomatic battle concerning its lost islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs'. This is another policy coup that serves Iran's vital national security interests. In fact, this was a source of empathy for Oman who has its own unresolved border dispute with the UAE. Lastly, Iran's use of large, joint military exercises, like its recent naval endeavors, could be used

[513] Ramazani, Rouhollah K. "The Emerging Arab-Iranian Rapprochement: Towards an Integrated US Policy in the Middle East?" *Middle East Policy*, vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1998).

[514] Ibid.

as a pretext for greater involvement both economically and militarily with other GCC countries. "Considering the lack of a coherent US policy in the region, the exercises are likely to help Iran build cooperation with Gulf neighbors."[515] This could lead to the achievement of another top Iranian policy goal—namely, the disintegration of the close alliance currently enjoyed by the US and the Arab nations of the GCC. Analyzed in this light, and within the context of neorealist state behavior theory, Tehran's sometimes conflicting policy directions take on a strategic pattern.

E. IRAN & SAUDI ARABIA RELATIONS

The final case study I would like to present is that of the international relations of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and Iran are heirs to two very different religious traditions, which have been in conflict for hundreds of years. This tension, however, is not only religious—it is national as well. Both Persian Iran and Arab Saudi Arabia are countries vying for hegemony in the Persian—or Arabian—Gulf. In fact, the very argument over the name of that body of water has become emblematic of that rivalry. Saudi Arabia also has a long list of grievances against Iran since the 1989 Islamic revolution, mostly concerning subversion among Saudi Arabia's Shi`a population in its Eastern province. Saudi Arabia has accused Iran of the same in majority Shi`a Bahrain.[516] Until about mid-1996, US policies of containing Iran dovetailed neatly with Saudi goals and fears, garnering Saudi support. However, changes in both Saudi Arabia and Iran —the same changes that forced the United States itself to reexamine its policy of containing Iran—have brought a radical change in Saudi Arabia's Iranian policy, which Riyadh is now calling a "détente" or "rapprochement." The roots of this change are manifold.[517]

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[515] However, the difficulty the Gulf states would face in creating a joint policy to contain Iraq makes it unlikely that the US military presence in the Gulf will be threatened.

[516] Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (1997), 45.

[517] Teiltelbaum, Joshua, "The Gulf States And The End Of Dual Containment," *MERIA*, vol. 2, no. 3 (September 1998) on the internet at http://www.meria.org [Accessed on 21 February 2000].

Since at least the late 1950s, three consistent themes have dominated Saudi foreign policy: regional security, Arab nationalism, and Islam. "These themes inevitably became closely intertwined during the formulation of actual policies."[518] For example, the preoccupation with regional security issues, including concern for both regime stability and the safety of petroleum exports, resulted in the kingdom's establishing a close strategic alliance with the United States. Yet this relationship, which remained strong in 1992, often had complicated Saudi efforts to maintain solidarity with other Arab countries, primarily because many Arabs, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, believed United States support for Israel was detrimental to their national interests.[519] The close ties with the non-Muslim United States also contrasted with the strained relations that existed between Saudi Arabia and certain predominantly Muslim countries that challenged the kingdom's efforts to portray it as the principal champion of Islamic causes.

1. Iran and the Character of Saudi Arabian Diplomacy

Saudi policies present a markedly different kind of challenge to Iran than do the policies of the more active and aggressive Iraq. First, Saudi Arabia is the largest state on the Arab side of the Gulf—automatically conferring upon it a role of major rival. Since maturing as a state following the accession of King 'Abd-al-'Aziz al-Sa'ud after World War I, Saudi Arabia has increasingly followed a conservative and cautious foreign policy of non-confrontation and accommodation while conducting inter-Arab and regional politics.[520] It withstood the challenge of revolutionary Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s and of revolutionary Iraq in the 1960s and 1970s. It has managed to maintain its Arab credentials successfully enough to stave off any serious revolutionary challenge, while using its "checkbook diplomacy" to blunt other potential challengers such as Syria and the early radicalism of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[521]

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[518] Ibid.

[519] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 111.

[520] Tarock (1999), 99.

[521] Fuller, (1990), 106-107.

Now shorn of the élan of the early Saudi state, Saudi policy over the last four decades has become defensive in character.[522] Similar to the policies of other, smaller Gulf states, Saudi Arabia has studiously avoided involvement in regional conflict wherever possible. Conflicts anywhere in the Arab world create divisions, force all parties to take sides, and result in making inevitable—and potentially dangerous—enemies. To avoid involvement in potentially risky conflicts, Riyadh has sought to play the mediator in regional conflicts, gain legitimacy for its act of noninvolvement, and gain possible credit for the peacemaking role.[523] The Saudis have often opted for the short-term tactical accommodation, despite the long-term strategic cost. Riyadh has always sought to maintain good ties wherever possible with radical states in the region that pose potential threats. This has meant the adoption of more radical positions on Arab "motherhood" issues such as Palestine and the PLO; here Saudi Arabia has not moved against the Arab consensus and often has only moved when the main radical opponents, particularly Syria, acquiesce.[524]

Riyadh will have recourse against more powerful neighbors only *in extremis* and in self-defense and when other options are exhausted. On one hand, it will even less willingly invoke US defensive support unless the nature of the challenge is so great as to outweigh the "delegitimizing" character of reliance upon foreign—and especially US—strength. On the other hand, with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 the security threat to Riyadh became so imminent as to outweigh the Saudi's reservations, accepting the US security embrace—regardless of the cost. Remember, in response to Iraqi's aggression against Kuwait, but more to protect the valuable Persian Gulf oilfields of Saudi Arabia, the US put together an impressive international coalition, and accomplished no more and no less than it had promised: to remove Saddam from Kuwait. In addition, the US was not shy about calling in the cards. In the next five years or so, Saudi Arabia followed the US lead: It bought billions of dollars of US arms, supported

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[522] Ibid., 108.

[523] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 116.

[524] Ibid., 116.

the Madrid conference and the Oslo agreement, and even partly ended the boycott of Israel.[525] This was difficult because the Kingdom's natural preference is to follow—not set—an Arab consensus on the Arab–Israeli conflict. Saudi Arabia also gave dual containment a chance and followed US policy on Iraq and Iran.[526] On the other hand, Riyadh did not hesitate long in denying US forces' use of Saudi Arabian air bases to stage planned massive air strikes against Iraq in retaliation for Saddam Huessen's expulsion of the UN monitoring team in 1996. There are two reasons to avoid military conflict, regardless of a state's assessment of its own strength. First, it requires strengthening the armed forces, which could potentially turn against the regime itself. Secondly, a defeat, however small, carries danger due to its negative impact upon the image of the ruling family. Saudi policy moves slowly and does not get out in front of any issue. Temporize and let issues resolve themselves where possible has been the Saudi formula.[527]

2. Historical Iranian-Saudi Relations

Iran and Saudi Arabia have little history of long-term mutual hostilities; the two states rarely encountered each other until the modern era. Iran has generally held Arabs in contempt as "uncivilized" and "lizard eaters."[528] This is a prejudice that extends back at least as far as the Arab conquest of Iran when largely Bedouin Arab armies from the Arabian peninsula were the spearhead of the invasion. The term "Arab" strongly implies "Bedouin" in common Persian parlance.[529] The aggressive role Saudi Wahhabi forces played along the Gulf coast for a number of years in both the early 19th and early 20th centuries when Wahhabi power temporarily threatened smaller Gulf rulers.[530] Iran, like other Arab powers, was well aware of the zealous, puritanical, and fundamentalist

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[525] Teitelbaum, Internet.

[526] Ibid.

[527] Fuller, (1990), 107.

[528] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 125.

[529] Fuller, (1990), 108.

[530] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 126.

character of Wahhabi Islam—and Persians were even more aware of its strong, anti-Shi'ite character from its raids into the Shi'ite Holy Places of southern Iraq when in 1802 Wahhabis desecrated the holy Shi'ite shire of Qarbala.[531] However, it was the modern Arab challenges to Iran of Egypt's Nasser, starting in the 1950s, that directed Iran's attention to Saudi Arabia as a significant player in the Arab equation.[532] For Nasser also threatened the Saudis, and concern for the spread of Arab radicalism in the Gulf became of mutual concern for both Riyadh and Tehran. The 1958 overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq brought the threat of radical Arab nationalism to the doorstep of both the Shah and the Saudis.[533]

While sharing this common concern, there was little love lost between the two states. It is impossible to view Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia independently of the over all "cold war' between Iran and the Arabs. Saudi Arabia was a member of the Arab League, which, under strong Egyptian influence, had launched an aggressive diplomatic and propaganda assault against "Iranian imperialism" in the Gulf.[534] Likewise, Saudi Arabia and Iran are heirs to two very different religious traditions, which have been in conflict for hundreds of years.[535]

3. The Dark Decade in Relations

During the 1980s, Iran-Saudi relations reached their lowest nadir. First, Khomeini's fiery rhetoric and direct verbal bashings on the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's role as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Places" attacked and threatened the very heart of the Saudi monarchy. Khomeini sermons during this time regularly proclaimed that there is no monarchy in Islam and that the concepts of monarchy and Islam contradicted each

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[531] Lapidus, Ira. *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 356.

[532] Tarock (1999), 102; Lapidus, 368.

[533] Fuller, (1990), 108

[534] Ibid., 109.

[535] Teitelbaum, Internet.

other.[536] That coupled with the overthrow of a brother monarchy in Tehran was ill-received in Riyadh. Then the Iran-Iraq War began. In a chance to indirectly retaliate against Khomeini and his revolutionaries, Saudi Arabia threw its financial support behind Saddam Huessein's forces—much to the ire of Iran. Seeing Saudi Arabia in the enemy's camp, Iran's fundamentalist militants had no compunction in their next action, which would bring relations to their lowest point in the 20th century.[537]

Saudi Arabia's postwar concerns about Iraq led to a level of rapprochement with Iran during 1991.[538] Historically, relations with non-Arab Iran had been correct, although the Saudis tended to distrust Iranian intentions and to resent the perceived arrogance of the Shah. Nevertheless, the two countries had cooperated on regional security issues despite their differences over specific policies such as oil production quotas. The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 disrupted this shared interest in regional political stability.[539] From a Saudi perspective, the rhetoric of some Iranian revolutionary leaders, who called for the overthrow of all monarchies as being un-Islamic, presented a serious subversive threat to the regimes in the area. Political disturbances in the kingdom during 1979 and 1980, including the violent occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Sunni religious extremists and riots among Saudi Shi'a in the Eastern Province, reinforced the perception that Iran was exploiting, even inciting, discontent as part of a concerted policy to export its revolution.[540] Consequently, the Saudi government was pleased when Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia remained officially neutral throughout the Iran-Iraq War, even though in practice its policies made it an effective Iraqi ally. [541]

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[536] Robinson, Personal correspondence.

[537] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 149.

[538] Teitelbaum, Internet.

[539] Yapp, Malcolm E. *The Near East Since the First World War: A History to 1995, Second Edition* (London: Longman, 1996), 196; Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 149.

[540] Teitelbaum, Internet.

[541] Metz, *Iran*, 118.

The thorniest issue in Saudi-Iranian relations during the 1980s was not Riyadh's discreet support of Baghdad but the annual Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca that took place in the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. Contention over the participation in Hajj rituals of Iranian pilgrims, who numbered about 150,000 in this period and comprised the largest single national group among the approximately 2 million Muslims who attended the yearly Hajj rites, symbolized the increasing animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran.[542] Tehran insisted that its pilgrims had a religious right and obligation to engage in political demonstrations during the Hajj. Riyadh, however, believed that the behavior of the Iranian pilgrims violated the spiritual significance of the Hajj and sought to confine demonstrators to isolated areas where their chanting would cause the least interference with other pilgrims. Because the Saudis esteemed their role as protectors of the Muslim holy sites in the Hijaz, the Iranian conduct presented a major dilemma: to permit unhindered demonstrations would detract from the essential religious nature of the Hajj; to prevent the demonstrations by force would sully the government's international reputation as guardian of Islam's most sacred shrines.[543] Tensions increased yearly without a satisfactory resolution until the summer of 1987, when efforts by Saudi security forces to suppress an unauthorized demonstration in front of Mecca's Grand Mosque led to the deaths of more than 400 pilgrims, at least two-thirds of whom were Iranians. This tragedy stunned the Saudis and galvanized their resolve to ban all activities not directly associated with the Hajj rituals.[544] In Tehran, angry mobs retaliated by ransacking the Saudi embassy; they detained and beat several diplomats, including one Saudi official who subsequently died from his injuries. These incidents severed the frayed threads that still connected Saudi Arabia and Iran; in early 1988, Riyadh cut its diplomatic relations with Tehran, in effect closing the primary channel by which Iranian pilgrims obtained Saudi visas required for the Hajj. [545]

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[542] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 212; Yapp, 198.

[543] Ibid., 215

[544] United States Library of Congress, *Iran,* Internet.

[545] Ibid.

In 1988, Saudi Arabia declared at the annual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) that it would assign a quota to each country based on the principle of one thousand pilgrims for each million of its Muslim population. The proposal was accepted with one dissenting voice — that of Iran. After that, Iran stopped sending pilgrims in protest. The Saudis on their part made doubly sure that the Iranians did not reach Mecca by abruptly breaking off diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1988.[546]

Although Iran began to indicate its interest in normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia as early as 1989, officials in Saudi Arabia remained suspicious of Tehran's motives and did not reciprocate its overtures for almost two years. The Persian Gulf War, however, significantly altered Saudi perceptions of Iran.[547] The unexpected emergence of Iraq as a mortal enemy refocused Saudi security concerns and paved the way for a less hostile attitude toward Iran. For example, Riyadh welcomed Tehran's consistent demands for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and interpreted Iran's strict adherence to neutrality during the conflict as a positive development. Despite their lingering doubts about Tehran's aims vis-à-vis the Shi'a population of southern Iraq, the Saudis recognized after the war that they and the Iranians shared an interest in containing Iraq and agreed to discuss the prospects of restoring diplomatic relations.

4. 1990-1991 Gulf War: A Fresh Beginning for Iran

The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait sent shivers down the spines of the Iranians, and the subsequent US determination to punish Saddam Hussein thrilled their hearts. The evolving Iranian policy on the issue marked a radical departure from its earlier Islamic revolutionary ideology on many points.[548] In sharp contrast with its consistent position of

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[546] Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia* (1997), 212; Tarock (1997), 39.

[547] Bahgat, 89.

[548] Dietl, Gulshan . "Iran in the Emerging Greater Middle East," *Copenhagen Peace Research Institute* (January 1999) on the internet at https://wwwc.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/srchfrm.html [Accessed on 22 February 2000].

keeping the Gulf out of bounds for foreign military presence, Rafsanjani came close to accepting it as unavoidable under the circumstances. "We have no objection to them obstructing aggression; anybody may help in any way; however, it would have been better if the regional countries had done so."[549]

When Saddam sought to woo the Iranians by his peace offer, the GCC rushed in to outbid him. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah, visited Tehran on 22 August 1990 and met his counterpart, Velayeti, with a message for Rafsanjani. He expressed his regrets for the "past mistakes" of Kuwaiti support to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, which the Iranians accepted.[550] In the following month, there was constant one-way traffic of high-level GCC dignitaries paying visits to Tehran. The culmination came on 29 September 1990, when the Foreign Ministers of the GCC countries met Velayeti in the Iranian office at UN Headquarters in New York. On 19 November 1990, Fawzi al-Jasii presented his credentials in Tehran as the new Kuwaiti Ambassador.

The GCC Summit met at Doha, Qatar, from 22 to 25 December 1990 and, in an unusual move, invited the Iranian Ambassador to Qatar, Nasrollah Mirzaiee Nasir, to attend one of its sessions. The Summit communiqué contained a special section on "Relations with Iran" in which the GCC welcomed the Iranian desire to improve its relations with all GCC countries and stressed its own desire to establish relations with Iran on the basis of "good neighborliness, noninterference in domestic affairs and respect for sovereignty, independence, and peaceful coexistence deriving from the bonds of religion and heritage that link the countries of the region". Further, it underlined the importance of serious and realistic action to settle all outstanding differences between Iran and the GCC.[551] The Doha Summit marked the high point of Iran's reconciliation with the GCC. The differences inherent in the worldview of Iran and the GCC countries,

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[549] Ibid.

[550] Ibid.

[551] Ibid. For the text of the communique, Dietl suggests seeing British Broadcasting Company (BBC) "Selected World Broadcasts-Middle East" (London, 29 December 1990) on the internet at http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.shtml [Accessed 16 April 2000].

and their mutual suspicions of the roles they aspired to play in the regional power game, were irreconcilable. In any case, Iran simply stayed out of the war. It kept up its search for a rapprochement with individual GCC states in the aftermath of the war.

5. Post-Gulf War Relations

In 1992, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei himself issued a *fatwa*[552] that the performance of any ritual by the Shi'is, which created discord among the Muslims or weakened Islam, was *haram* (evil).[553] Ayatollah Reyshahri, his representative, led pilgrims from Iran with a message of "friendship, unity, and brotherhood under the banner of monotheism."[554] Thus, after many years, the Hajj season passed off in an atmosphere of cordiality rather than tight security. Appointed as the new Iranian Ambassador to Riyadh in June 1992, Gholam Ali Nadjafabadi presented his credentials saying, "The Islamic world has two wings, and it is not possible to fly without its two wings of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Both have their weight and place in the Islamic world."[555] The statement marked a 180-degree turn in the official Iranian attitude to Saudi Arabia and went a long way in facilitating the process of reconciliation between the two.

First, Saudi Arabia, in effect, has a new king. 'Abdallah bin 'Abd al-Aziz, crown prince and half-brother of King Fahd, has been running the Kingdom's day-to-day affairs since November 1995. The new leader seems intent on making his mark and shifting the direction of the Kingdom's foreign policy. [556] As predicted, 'Abdallah has decided to embark on an independent path whereby Saudi Arabia puts a priority on regional

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[552] In Islamic religious law a *fatwa* is a religious opinion, formal legal opinion or a verdict on a specific subject

[553] *Tehran Times,* 26 May 1992 (DR). The Shi'is kiss the holy shrine in Medina and say their prayers in the Baqi cemetery, where the bodies of several holy imams are lying buried.

[554] Ibid.

[555] Teitelbaum, Internet.

[556] Ibid.

relationships. Moreover, this move toward Iran comes at a time, paradoxically, when the Saudis—apparently— believe Iran was directly or indirectly responsible for the June 1996 Khobar Tower bombing which killed 19 US soldiers.[557] The Saudis never accused Iran publicly but leaked the accusation widely. In late March 1998, Saudi Minister of Interior Na'if bin 'Abd al-'Aziz suddenly announced the investigation had been closed but released no findings. The US considers the investigation still open, claiming it was not informed of this development.[558]

Despite the findings of the Saudi security's investigation into the bombing, which found "no evidence" connecting Iran to the event (evidence and witnesses that the US investigators were denied access too), recent revelations by an Iranian defector may prove otherwise. Iranian Ahmad Behbahani, told major media outlets that "he was an Iranian intelligence official responsible for coordinating overseas assassinations and terrorism operations for more than a decade before his defection to Turkey four months ago."[559] Additionally, he reportedly chose to speak with reporters instead of government officials for fear that all concerned governments might seek to "eliminate him" to avoid the necessary responses Washington would be forced to make in retaliation;[560] responses which would torpedo the climate warming relations for Iran between both Saudi Arabia and the US. If true, all this leads to one conclusion: Riyadh is holding back the full details of the investigation to prevent a US reprisal against Iran.[561] Interior Minister

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[557] *CNN.* . "Massive Bomb Rocks US Military Complex," (26 June 1996) on the internet at http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9606/25/saudi.explosion/ [Accessed on 22 July 2000].

[558] *Associated Press* (hereafter *AP). (* 30 March 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999]. However, recent revelations of Iranian government complicity on both the Khobar Tower bombing and the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 has the potential of derailing Iran's steady efforts to mend relations, albeit on Tehran's terms. If proven true the US might be compelled to act in retaliation. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia would be presented with a dire choice—support US efforts or oppose them; each would have a hefty cost abroad and at home, respectively.

[559] *CNN.* "Iran Denies Defector's Terror Claims; US Also Doubts Story," (6 June 2000) on the internet at http://www.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/meast/06/06/iran.defector/ [Accessed on 22 July 2000].

[560] Ibid.

[561] The assertion that Iranian-backed Saudi Shi'is were behind the bombing must still be viewed cautiously. The Sunni Saudi opposition has insisted that the regime has imprisoned Sunni Saudis for the operation. Moreover, information leaked on the Iranian connection is from Saudi sources who have an interest in pointing at Iranian involvement to draw attention away from the more threatening problem of the

Na'if's public refusal to confirm the Iranian connection speaks volumes concerning Saudi Arabia's dilemma. This action not only reflects Saudi wishes to turn over a new leaf with Iran, but also a determination to put its own regional concerns above those of its main military backer. Riyadh believes US resolve is eroding with respect to Iran and grows increasingly wary of talk in Washington about reassessing the dual containment policy. Moreover, if there was a public statement about an Iranian connection, the US would most likely feel compelled to retaliate. Saudi Arabia worried that Washington might undertake military operations strong enough to enrage Iran, but not enough to cause any lasting change. [562]

6. Iran's "Charm Offensive": A Swift Shift in Tenor

a. The Year 1997

In March 1997, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayeti visited Saudi Arabia to invite its leaders to the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Tehran at the end of that year. Iran for its part was interested in exploiting Saudi fears to ensure Riyadh's stamp of approval for the planned. Meeting with King Fahd and other top Saudi officials, Iranian Foreign Minster Velayati delivered a speech, which was uncharacteristically gracious. The Saudi press responded quite enthusiastically to this visit. One newspaper wrote:

> The two countries have so many things in common, and shared security interests are such that the two countries would do well to overcome the crisis of confidence bedeviling their relations. The facts that favor an existential partnership between the Kingdom and Iran are many. They go beyond such things as common border and they share Islamic faith.[563]

Furthermore, this paper concluded that the two countries are in the same boat, both in times of war and peace, and it would serve them well to take "direct

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Sunni Islamic opposition (on this, see the Washington Institute for Near East Policy "Policywatch" at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch1997/255. htm).

[562] Teitelbaum, Internet.

[563] *Al-Riyadh* (17 March 1997 in FBIS-ME-97-312, 19 March 1997), 2.

responsibility"—rather than delegate it to the United States—for security arrangements in the Gulf.[564] Such statements are finding a ready audience among a Saudi populace that has grown weary of America's seemingly "never-ending war" on Iraq from Saudi Arabian territory.

After Mohammed Khatami's election as Iran's president in May 1997, these warming relations went into high-gear. The year, 1997, witnessed a flurry of visits between the two countries. First, demonstrating Riyadh's desire for better relations with the new Tehran administration, Saudi Crown Prince 'Abdullah (for all intents and purposes the current day-to-day ruler of Saudi Arabia since 1995) visited Tehran in June ostensibly to confirm the Saudi participation at the OIC summit.[565] Also, in late June 1997, the two countries—traditionally at loggerheads over oil policy—spearheaded an effort to convince OPEC countries to stop violating oil production quotas. One of the biggest promoters of this dialogue, Iran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, revealed that he had even met with the Kingdom's top cleric and arbiter of Wahhabism, General Mufti Shaykh 'Abdallah Bin Baz, and other members of the Saudi Council of Senior *'ulama*.[566] This is especially significant since Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi Islam has often been the most strident critic of Iran's Shi'i Islam.

In September 1997, direct flights resumed between Tehran and Jeddah—the first such scheduled flights in 18 years. The strongest single statement of the positive reassessment of its relations with Tehran came in December 1997, with the attendance of a high-level Saudi delegation at the Iranian-chaired OIC summit. The delegation was headed by 'Abdallah, who even offered publicly to mediate between the US and Iran. "It is not hard for our Iranian brothers or for a friendly country like Iran or for a friendly country like the United States to reach a settlement [of] their differences," he stated.[567]

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[564] Ibid.

[565] The OIC summit turned out to be a colossal event, marking the Islamic world's confirmation of the legitimacy of Iran's Islamic revolution under its newly elected moderate President Khatami.

[566] *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (4 July 1997 in FBIS-ME-97-765, 9 July 1997), 6.

[567] *AP* (8 December 1997), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

'Abdallah met with Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and with Khatami for two rounds of talks. The deputy commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) and 'Abdallah's second in command, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Tuwayjiri assessed that "Iran and the Arabs [were] heading for more cooperation and coordination which will allow them take their natural place in the world and to serve the Islamic nation."[568]

b. The Years 1998-1999

The year 1998 began with a dreaded portend as Iraq assembled its troops in a veiled-threat against Kuwait. The US began a major work up to a potential of massive air strikes from bases in the Middle East; however, a distinct lack of Saudi support for US efforts to pressure Baghdad marked the February 1998 crisis. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to drum up support for a military strike was met by a stone wall in Saudi Arabia. She left without getting 'Abdallah's approval for the US to use Saudi airbases. Similarly, when Secretary of Defense William Cohen followed to press the issue, he still could not get approval for their use. In explaining the Kingdom's position, Defense Minister Sultan bin 'Abd al-Aziz said that US efforts were seen as "insensitive to local concerns, bullying, and embarrassing."[569] In addition, Saudi press pleaded with the US to take out Saddam himself, instead of waging a war on the entire country. One newspaper wrote that "he is not an impossible target," citing the fact that the US had captured Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega in 1990.[570] This weakening of support for US policy has provided enough chinks in the armor to allow Tehran to leverage itself increasingly into Saudi rapprochement. Likewise, for the Saudis, their goals had shifted toward a desire to "get along in the neighborhood."[571] The feeling was that if Washington could not definitely get rid of Saddam himself in this proposed strike,

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[568] Ibid.

[569] *AP* (8 February 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

[570] *Washington Times* (3 February 1998), 1, 5, Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

[571] *AP* (15 December 1997), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

then Saudi Arabia did not want to enable it in any way. Moreover, Saudi Arabia was dealing with a continuous negative undercurrent to continue American military presence in the country and the other significant "threat"—Iran—had actually come a long way in proving itself as non-threatening to Saudi Arabia itself. Taking all this into account—especially Washington's "pin-prick" scheme to harass the Iraqis, Saudi Arabia began contemplating a potential shift in its local arrangements—with Iran as an important partner—at least in the short term. For Iran, their goal of finding a counterbalance to Iraq and making one more step toward forcing US forces from the Gulf region, was a big leap forward.

During this period, Rafsanjani, as a former Iranian President, paid an official visit to Saudi Arabia and, in a diplomatic boon, met with visiting Bahraini ruler, Sheikh Salman al-Khalifa. In view of Bahraini accusations of Iranian involvement in its domestic disturbances, the meeting signified a thaw in Iran-Bahrain relations.[572] More mutual visits followed, including the March 1998 visit of an Iranian warship, which docked at Jeddah. During the last Hajj, Fahd's son, Faysal, who heads Saudi Arabia's sports commission, invited the entire Iranian soccer team to make the pilgrimage at his expense in appreciation for their qualifying for the World Cup tournament.[573]

Then, on 27 May 1998, Iranian and Arabian Foreign Ministers signed a wide-reaching bilateral agreement promoting cooperation in the fields of trade and business, economy, joint investment, science, technology, culture, tourism, and sports. [574] Other areas slated for bilateral cooperation include industries, mining, air and sea transportation links, and environmental protection.[575] During Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal's two-day visit to Iran, both he and Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal

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[572] STRATFOR. "Intense Diplomacy in Wake of Iraqi Crisis," (25 February 1998) on the internet at (http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/022598.asp) [Accessed on 14 May 2000].

[573] *AP* (8 March 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 30 October 1999].

[574] *Iran Focus* (Norfolk), vol.11, no.6 (DR) (June 1998), 15.

[575] STRATFOR. "Saudi Arabia and Iran Expand Bilateral Cooperation," on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/052898.asp [Accessed on 20 May 2000].

Kharrazi expressed their countries' commitment to continued and expanded cooperation in economic and political matters. Prince Saud reportedly told Kharrazi that Saudi King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah "are decisive to upgrade ties with Iran,"[576] and that they are "eagerly awaiting a visit to Saudi Arabia by Khatami to further boost bilateral ties."[577] Kharrazi reportedly responded that close and friendly Iranian-Saudi relations were "sincere and serious," and that Iran stands ready to "upgrade bilateral relations to the highest level."[578] Following his meeting with visiting Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abd al Aziz al Saud, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said that there are no longer any outstanding differences between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[579] This possible reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has serious political, military, and economic ramifications for the region.[580] Khatami said that the two countries now have a relationship based on friendship and cooperation. "The recent contacts between the two sides have resolved all problems and there is currently no hurdle for the two states to expanding their ties in all fields."[581] Even Khamene'i himself has praised the improvement in relations and expressed hope that they would develop even more.[582] Khatami's comments could signal a major shift in the relationship between the two states, with possible economic, political, and military implications for the whole Middle East region.

Beyond the benefits Iran might hope to realize in oil production and pricing, and in reestablishing connections with the West, there are other geopolitical advantages as well. After the assassination of a senior Iranian general by Iraq-based Iranian opposition

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[576] Ibid.

[577] Ibid.

[578] *Tehran Times* (26 January 1998 in FBIS-ME-98-098, 29 January 1998), 7.

[579] STRATFOR. "Saudi Arabia and Iran Expand Bilateral Cooperation," Internet.

[580] STRATFOR. "Iranian-Saudi Consensus Holds Seeds of Major Regional Realignment" (May 4, 1999) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/050499.asp [Accessed on 20 May 2000].

[581] Ibid.

[582] Ibid.

forces, tensions have once again risen along the Iran-Iraq border. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has reportedly captured a number of Iraqi infiltrators, and Iraq claims to be preparing for a major US or US-led attack or invasion.

Following the failure of the US to take action against Iraq in February 1998,[583] Iran launched an initiative aimed at building a NATO-style Arab-Persian regional military alliance, which was of interest to many Arab nations. At the time, the *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* declared, "If the regional countries had enjoyed a constructive consensus about controlling the Iraqi regime's irrational behavior, surely today they would have been immune from America's tension-inducing presence in the region." [584] Again, the Saudi press gushed that Saudi Arabia and Iran were like two wings, without whose cooperation a bird cannot fly. Rafsanjani met with Saudi businessmen and implored them to open the country to Iranian labor. The two countries agreed to set up a joint commission to study bilateral relations.[585] Foreign Minister Sa'ud al Faysal termed the visit "a new chapter in cooperation."[586] A particularly revealing incident occurred during Rafsanjani's visit. While at Friday prayers in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, the imam of the mosque subjected Rafsanjani to a vitriolic diatribe against Shi'ism, the kind of statement Wahhabi preachers often make. Several top Shi'i clerics in Iran issued *fatwas* forbidding Iranians from attending prayer led by this particular imam at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. However, the head of Iran's Hajj delegation, Ayatollah Reyshari, who was a representative of Khatami, said that this was not proper, and to do so—to boycott this imam—would give Iran and Shi'is a bad name. Appreciatively, the Saudis fired the imam. Rafsanjani later categorically denied that Saudi Arabia was against Shi'ism, an accusation frequently made by Iranian political and

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[583] STRATFOR "Possible US Pullout Promotes Iran-GCC Cooperation," (5 October 1999) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/meaf/specialreports/special13.htm [Accessed on 20 May 2000].

[584] STRATFOR. "US Search for Rapprochement with Iran Becomes Public," (30 December 1999) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/123099.asp [Accessed on 20 May 2000].

[585] STRATFOR. "Saudi Arabia and Iran Expand Bilateral Cooperation," Internet.

[586] Ibid.; and *Reuters (*28 February 1998), Lexis-Nexis [Accessed on 22 May 2000].

religious leaders.[587] Iran, which currently heads the OIC, has also been attempting to increase the activity and effectiveness of that group in solving international disputes in hopes that this newfound cooperation with the Saudis might be the begin the formalization of a coordinated Iraq policy.[588]

With the US losing credibility in the region due to its weak and vacillating policies on Iraq and Israel, commenting, "Iran is now busily spinning its own web, trying to replace the United States as Saudi Arabia's guarantor."[589] In a 29 July 1998, Iran's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mohammad Reza Nouri, demonstrated just how far Iranian-Saudi relations had come in six months by granting an interview with in the London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat.* Nouri told the newspaper that "Iran's missile capabilities are at the disposal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."[590] He continued

> We believe that Iran's power is the kingdom's power, and the kingdom's power is Iran's power. Our relations with Saudi Arabia have reached a historical stage where we are complementing one another, and if we have a missile or non-missile capability, it is at the kingdom's disposal.[591]

Saudi Arabia has yet to respond publicly to Nouri's comments. [592] Nouri rejected concerns raised in the US and European press that Iran's new Shahab-3 missile threatens

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[587] Rafsanjani, Ali Akbar Hashemi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Press Conference on 11 March 1996, published by *IRNA* (14 March 1996) Lexis-Nexis [Accessed 20 May 2000].

[588] STRATFOR. "Iranian-Saudi Relations Peak with Missile Offer," (31 July 1998) on the internet at <http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/073198.asp [Accessed on 14 May 2000]. Unfortunately, however, recent revelations of Iranian government complicity on both the Khobar Tower bombing and the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 has the potential of derailing Iran's steady efforts to mend relations, albeit on Tehran's terms. If proven true the US might be compelled to act in retaliation. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia would be presented with a dire choice—support US efforts or oppose them; each would have a hefty cost abroad and at home, respectively.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Ibid.

[591] Ibid.

[592] STRATFOR "Intense Diplomacy in Wake of Iraqi Crisis," (25 February 1998) on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/services/giu/022598.asp [Accessed on 14 May 2000].

Saudi Arabia, saying, "They are not aware of the status of relations between us and the kingdom, which have entered a new stage." Kuwait, also rapidly growing close to Iran, has already announced that it does not consider Iran's new missile to be a threat to the region.[593]

c. The Year 2000

The evolution in Iranian-Saudi relations continued through 1999 into the new millennium. Iranian policy makers have remained vigilant in their policy maneuvers to end their isolation, encourage economic growth, and balance against potential territorial threats. A more recent example of Iranian finesse in penetrating U.S. containment can be found in Tehran's tangential support to the recent Saudi Arabian crackdown on a minority religious sect, the Ismaili,[594] as well as the border dispute with Yemen the event has precipitated.[595] Tehran was quick to tender its services, enhanced by its recent upgrade in relations with Saudi Arabia, by offering itself as a peace-broker in the Saudi-Yemeni dispute.[596] The Saudi security services may have cracked down on the Ismailis in anticipation of Yemen-backed infiltrators in the Saudi-Yemen border dispute. Saudi Arabian military forces in late-January 2000 reportedly occupied the strategic Jahfan Mountain along the border with Yemen.[597] Saudi Arabia's occupation of this mountain has further soured relations between Riyadh and Sanaa. Yemen has a

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[593] STRATFOR. "US Search for Rapprochement with Iran Becomes Public,"Internet.

[594] The Ismaili sect is an offshoot of Shi'a Islam, the split having occurred hundreds of years ago over recognition of the Seventh Imam. Today, the Ismaili sect is relatively small and is not supported by the larger Shi'ite community. Sunni Muslims are the majority in Saudi Arabia; Shi'ites make up only 7-10percent. There is no official number of Ismailis in Saudi Arabia, but Saudi diplomats say there are tens of thousands of Ismailis, mostly living in the mountainous regions of the southwest, according to AFP.

[595] STRATFOR. "Saudi Government Moves Toward Unstable Ground with Crackdown," (25 April 2000), on the internet at http://www.stratfor.com/SERVICES/giu2000/ 042500.asp [Accessed on 14 May 2000].

[596] Ibid.

[597] STRATFOR. "Saudi Government Moves toward Unstable Ground with Crackdown," Internet.

significant Shi'ite population, many of whom belong to the Ismaili sect, located across and along the border with Saudi Arabia.[598]

Reminiscent of the Saudi-Qatar dispute in 1997, this new Saudi border crisis provides Iran another opportunity to play the role of "honest" peace-broker and further penetrate the US containment cordon, ingratiating itself to its Arab neighbors. While Iran and Yemen signed cooperation agreements in several fields on 19 April 2000, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been moving closer to signing a bilateral security agreement. As stated previously, Riyadh appears to be warming to the idea of bettering its regional ties with states like Iran to balance against future Iraqi aggression given apparent US impotence in this regard.

7. Structural Imperatives in Iran-Saudi Relations

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become a key consideration for both of these nations—and the world at large. Over the past 20 years, suppressed rivalry and distrust on several levels have characterized relations between these two states. Beyond the strong influence U.S. relations plays upon, the ability to transcend past this mutual distrust depends mainly on how capable Iran and Saudi Arabia are of altering their entrenched biases for one another. These asymmetries and differing priorities will set the parameters for cooperation in the Persian Gulf.[599] Iran-Saudi relations are constrained by a number of structural factors limiting significant security cooperation, exacerbated by the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.[600] Events since then have aggravated the threat from Iran and have increased mistrust. This situation may change if Iran transforms itself, but is unlikely to change enough for meaningful cooperation in security affairs. Instead, a balance of power among the three principal Gulf States seems inevitable, and the stability

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[598] Ibid. As an aside, the Saudi Arabian repression has more ominous implications. Saudi Arabia is seeing population growth at both extremes of its economic spectrum. Riyadh may have succeeded in isolating this crackdown of an outcast sect, but any future resort to strong-arm measures risks fueling popular discontent.

[599] Chubin and Tripp, 3.

[600] Ibid., 3.

of this balance will largely depend on the nature of domestic transformations within them.

The structural factors influencing Iran-Saudi relations include geopolitical differences, such as disparities in demography and geography, and consequent differing perspectives on regional issues. Questions about their respective influence in and leadership of Gulf affairs, oil issues and the role of outside powers compose the traditional "national interest" agenda. National, cultural, ethnic and sectarian divisions in the region, such as between Persian and Arab, Shi'a and Sunni, also aggravate the situation. The natural constituency and the relative weakness of the Arab Gulf states tend to "Arabize" bilateral disputes, thus magnifying issues and polarizing the region. For Iran, a dispute with any Arab neighbor risks becoming a dispute with all its Arab neighbors, infusing the situation with dramatic symbolism redolent of historical animosities. In addition to these structural factors are the particular challenges posed by the 1979 Iranian revolution. As the only Shi'i state, its religious leaders claimed a broad Islamic sanction for their revolution. During this period, Iran, in offering itself as a model for others and proclaiming a mission to extend true Islam to other states, painted itself as a direct threat to the Muslim Gulf states. The Iranian government's claim to speak for a putative universal Islamic authority has been a clear challenge to the Saudi government, which sees its legitimacy as, tied to its role of protector of the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina.

8. Review of Relations

In sum, currently Iran has been able to evolve its relations with the most wealthy and de facto leader of the GCC, Saudi Arabia, from a point of confrontation in the 1980s to the current positive state. Tehran has accomplished this in spite of the religious, political, and ideological differences between the two. Iran accomplished this because of its neorealist policy making. Tehran, in ten short years, has been able to increase its potential economic and security standing by increasingly wooing Riyadh away from the West (i.e., the US) and laying the groundwork for a potential regional alliance to offset Iraq, neutralize American presence, and lift the yoke of US economic sanctions.

Moreover, it is a policy that is working, according to Martin Indyk, US Ambassador to Israel and Middle East expert who points out:

> (T)he attempt to isolate Iran through unilateral trade sanctions has backfired since none of Iran's trading partners have been willing to abide by such heavy-handed tactics, and even close US allies such as Canada and the European Union have denounced the extra-territorial aspects of the sanctions as a violation of international trade law.....(Likewise) the prohibition of business contacts with Iran has effectively locked American companies out of thriving and lucrative markets across the region, which are then simply left open to their European, Chinese, and Japanese competitors.[601]

F. SUMMARY

Iranian national security and foreign relations policy with respects to the Persian Gulf States examined here proves Waltz's posit that neorealism is the true shaper of a state's policy. Iranian policy decisions and actions with regard to the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia demonstrate consistency when examined from the perspective of Tehran. Some opponents might suggest that Iranian decisions seem irrational to its economic well-being by illustrating the annexation of the disputed islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs'. But what is the significant threat? The evidence provided here suggests that threats to Iranian territorial integrity, its life-line to the world via the Strait of Hormuz, and the extra-regional threat posed by US military presence are the key determinants of its policy decisions. In this light, the sacrifice of its economy seems well worth the price for balancing against this threat.

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[601] Indyk, Martin. "American Foreign Policy and Iran :Time for a change?" (26 January 1999) on the internet at http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3163/ [Accessed on 12 April 2000].

VIII. CONCLUSION

The disintegration of the USSR and the appearance in its stead of a number of newly independent states in world politics has offered Iran a unique chance to break out of its isolation. The establishment of relations with the post-Soviet republics came at a time when the Islamic republic had entered a new stage of its evolution, with gradual retreat from rigid, and unacceptable, principles calling for an export of the Islamic revolution; at the same time its foreign policy was acquiring a pragmatic content.[602] Moreover, it seems that the change in the overall geopolitical situation has encouraged a rapid spread of pragmatism. At first, Iranian leaders had been thinking in terms of religious and cultural penetration, but soon they realized that however important the revival of the Muslim tradition might be, development of infrastructure, capital investment, and financial aid mattered much more for their new partners. In particular, Iran concluded about thirty basic agreements (26 of them on economic matters) with the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan.[603]

A. THE CASE STUDIES

1. Iran and Azerbaijan

The mounting wave of ethnic nationalism in the former Soviet Union had the potential of causing instability in Iran itself. In this respect, Azerbaijan arouses the greatest concern, since its Azeri population numbers about 6 million, while in Iran the number is two to three times as high. There were clear indications of Iranian concern over the prospect of Azerbaijani leaders' rising claims to Iranian Azerbaijan and the assistance rendered by Turkey in this regard when, as early as the spring of 1992, a large number were forced from top governmental posts. However, the Iranian-Azeris themselves were worried by possible destabilization, and they stressed their interest in Russian troops' remaining in the republic of Azerbaijan since their withdrawal could

[602] Zviagelskaya, 142.

[603] Ibid., 143.

result in undesirable consequences.[604] Further, Iranian policy towards Azerbaijan in the early 1990s prompted by several factors. First, a flow of Azeri refugees driven into Iran in 1993 as a result of increased Armenian-Azerbaijani hostilities increased Iranian concerns and contributed to further advancement of its relations with the new leadership of Azerbaijan. Second, Iranian rivalries with Turkey figured strongly in Tehran's policy responses.[605]

2. Iran and Turkey

As this case study has demonstrated Iran's national security policies and foreign relations imperatives have always been anchored in the neorealist concerns of territorial integrity, regime survival, economic prosperity, and balancing power in favorable ways to meet these goals. Iranian and Turkish relations have never been close, especially after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. However, each country was pragmatic in is approach to dealing with the other.

In Central Asia, Iran reined in its bankrupt strategy of exporting the Islamic revolution in favor of building economic ties with the countries of this region. This has the dual need of helping Iran breakout of its economic isolation and also to counter the threat presented by Turkey and Pan-Turanism, which could seal Iranian isolation if allowed to nurture and flourish. This is an area where Ankara and Tehran have found competitive interests.

Finally, there was the "Kurdish Question." When it believed the regional balance of power was at stake, Iran backed Kurdish factional elements to counter both its war-enemy Iraq and what Tehran perceived as Turkish interest in Iraq's northern oilfields. Later, when the potential of a Kurdish state reared its head, Tehran was quick to shift its policy in Ankara's favor to ensure Kurdish nationalism went unrealized. This policy shift also began what I call Iran's "regional engagement policy," and what others have dubbed

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[604] Ibid., 144.

[605] Cornell (1998), Internet.

its "charm offensive" in recent years as it attempts to overcome the side-effects of two decades of economic sanctions in one form or another and to begin the marginilaztion of U.S. military acceptance in the region. The Iranian's applied this policy approach to its relations with Turkey, especially in the cases of the new republics of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea, as well as the Kurdish factions in each country. Within each, Iran has identified potential dangers and opportunities and constructed its policies to match these issues to its primary goals.

3. Iran and Israel

This paper has argued that the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown a common thread of pragmatic, neorealistic propensity in formulating its policy when it believes that its vital national security imperatives are in jeopardy. These interests: to preserve Iran's territorial integrity; to avoid international isolation; to promote foreign trade, investment and commercial avenues for the technology transfers required for sustainable development; and of paramount import; and the removal of US presence and hegemonic influence in the Persian Gulf.[606]

From the earliest years of the Islamic Republic of Iran, during the thick of the Iran-Iraq War, Khomeini and his revolutionaries showed that they could set aside their principles and ideology and deal with the likes of Israel and the US. Likewise, by accepting the cease-fire agreement with Iraq, Tehran again demonstrated the capacity for their neorealist base to their policy decisions. Moreover, this pragmatism has continued to this day concerning the Arab-Israeli peace process; however, not in the way Western analysts might expect. Given the harsh economic yoke placed upon Iran, the *pragmatic* decision maker in the West might expect Tehran to give up its visceral opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. However, although some of the rhetoric had toned by mid-2000, the current eruption of violence between Israel and the Palestinians has changed the climate throughout the region. Tehran has remained somewhat muted in its

[606] Sadri, Internet; and Tarock (1997), 111.

official response to the recent Israeli-PLO impasse, although the sermons from the religious clergy have been more vilifying of Israel.

What I believe I have shown is the fact that Iran clearly feels threatened by the hegemonic influence of the United States, and that Tehran equates countries like Turkey and Israel as client agents of the US. In this light, some of Iran's actions make sense. Iran opposes the peace because it will put greater disequilibria into the balance of power between it and its regional neighbors. The Arab states are likely to focus more attention on Iran if they accept peace with Israel; Turkey's recent treaty with Israel certainly throws it into the Western camp in Tehran's eyes; and the enemy Iran fears the most—the US—further consolidates its influence over the region.

4. Iran and The Persian Gulf States

Finally, an examination of Iranian relations vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf states of the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia was provided. Each analysis within this case study illustrates Iranian national security and foreign relations policy as sometimes contradictory but always directed toward alleviating the tensions wrought upon its own critical security needs and perceptions. These Persian Gulf states have been suspicious of Iranian intentions in the Persian Gulf. Iran's annexation of Abu Musa and the Tunbs signaled to both Arab and Western observers alike that Iran's true goals were to gain regional hegemony in the Gulf. Iran's occupation and continued intransigence to allow the International Court of Justice to review the situation are at odds with Tehran's stated foreign policy goals of rapprochement with its Arab neighbors, and in recent years even with the US. As was discussed previously in this paper, some historical experts cite that Iranian claims appear much stronger then those of the UAE. With Iran's continued label as an international "rogue state" it is perhaps the case that Tehran does not feel it would receive a just review of its claims and a ruling against it might be the very impetus it feels the US would need to forcible take the territory from Iran on behalf of the UAE.

Iran has serious national security concerns throughout the region of the Persian Gulf and has sought, in recent years, to improve upon its relations with its Arab

neighbors to alleviate the tensions placed upon its ultimate national security concerns with threats to the foundations of Iranian sovereignty and the Islamic revolution. Iran's decisionmaking in this regard is anchored in neorealist behavior. Tehran perceives as true threats those that strike at the very fabric of the Iranian Islamic state, dealing with them swiftly through pragmatic, realpolitik. It is through this prism which Iran's policies and dealings with its GCC neighbors must be understood.

Moreover, despite Tehran's denials, occupation of the Gulf islands nurtures Iran's longing for hegemony in the Persian Gulf Region—which fits neatly with its desires to ensure the unquestionable achievement of its foreign policy imperatives. Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb serve a strategic purpose toward Iran's neorealist-based interests. Their location relative to the Strait of Hormuz provides Iran superb strategic position adjacent to shipping lanes and any inland targets on the western Persian Gulf. Additionally, Iran presents a better defense posture to aggressors with forward-deployed forces on these islands. It is for this reason that this territorial dispute has an impact on, and the attention of, the international community. Therefore, Iran continues to occupy and build-up "defensive" forces on these strategic islands. However, it is important to understand these territorial disputes over Bahrain and the three islands in the context of the evolution of Iranian-Arab relations and neorealism. The Pahlavi regime enjoyed close cooperation with the Gulf monarchies. The two sides advocated a conservative and pro-Western policy. The Iranian participation in defeating the leftist rebellion in Dhofar, Oman (from mid-1960s to mid-1970s) is an illustration of this close cooperation and common interests between two sides.[607] However, given the Arab suspicion in Iran's intentions, there was no formal security alliance in the Gulf.

The same type of behavior is also observed when analyzing Tehran's dealings with Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Naturally, the process of improving relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors has not hindered Tehran's efforts to enhance its

[607] Bahgat, 120. A leftist movement called the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman launched a guerrilla war against Al Said, the ruling family in Oman. This revolt was backed by another leftist's regime that came to power in Aden, South Yemen in 1969. The revolt was finally crushed in the mid-1970s with the aid of Iranian, Saudi, Jordanian, and British troops.

defense capability. This is Iran's pragmatism. Unlike Iraq, the Islamic Republic has been under less scrutiny by the international community to modernize its armed forces for most of the 1990s.

The Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power and the rhetoric of exporting the revolution deepened the gap between Iran and its Arab neighbors. Not surprisingly, for most of the 1980s the Arab monarchies supported Iraq in its war against Iran. The end of the fighting and Rafasanjani's rise to power opened a new chapter in the Gulf politics. Tehran's neutrality during the 1990-91 Gulf War crisis earned it goodwill among the six Gulf states. Taking advantage of this new political environment, Rafasanjani engaged in a series of confidence-building exercises with the Gulf rulers with many describing Tehran's new regional policy as "Rafsanjani's pragmatic peace."[608] According to this strategy, the Islamic Republic's behavior toward its neighbors is guided more by economic interests and less by religious dogma since the early 1990s.

B. IRAN TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today, Khatami's regional orientation is a continuation of a trend in political engagement with Iran's regional neighbors. Khatami made improving relations with Iran's neighbors as a cornerstone in his foreign policy. In the closing years of the 20th century, several signs pointed toward a potential rapprochement in Arab-Iran relations. These include the decision to raise diplomatic relations between Iran and Bahrain to the ambassadorial level for the first time in nearly twenty years and the high-level Arab turnout in the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) summit held in Tehran in December 1997.[609] Another significant step was the well-publicized visit by Iran's former President Rafsanjani to Saudi Arabia in early 1998 and the signing of several agreements for economic cooperation between the two nations. Similar, but slower, steps to improve relations with Iraq have accompanied this process of building confidence

[608] Ramazani (June 1998), 47.

[609] Bahgat, 121; and al-Hamd, Turki. " Looking at the Gulf at the Start of '98" *Arabnet.com* (1 January 1998) on the internet at http://www.arab.net/arabview/articles/hamd1.html [Accessed on 25 March 2000]. In this summit Crown Prince Abdullah represented Saudi Arabia and was the most eminent member of the Saudi royal family to have visited Iran since the Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

between Iran and the Gulf monarchies. During the Islamic summit the Iraqi Vice President, Taha Yasin Ramadan, was the most senior official to visit Iran since the revolution. A significant exchange of prisoners of war between the two countries followed this 1998 agreement, permitting Iranian pilgrims to resume direct travel to Shi'i shrines in Iraq for the first time since 1980.[610]

C. SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

Ambassador Sheehan's official testimony before the Senate in 1999 is quite correct in charging that some support continues to make its way from Iran to several terrorist groups.[611] However, it is also true that there has been a marked decline in that support from what is was during the 1980s. It seemingly runs counter to the logic of state neorealism predictions given the economic hardship Iran endures for this continued support, except in those cases where Iran feels a greater need to gain a balance of power by using these unconventional tools—as is the case with Hezbollah and Israel.

The Iranian leadership, led by the religious 'ulama, has become desperate over US power and intentions both directly and through its alliances in the region. As a weak and isolated state Iran feels a greater need to gain a balance of power by using the unconventional tools of terrorism in the case with Hezbollah and Israel to stymie the peace process. [612]

These case studies of Iranian relations clearly demonstrate that the country's leadership formulates policy and makes decisions based on neorealist theory. Neorealism, and the need for a weaken state to balance power in the region more accurately explains state behavior in vital issues of foreign policy and national security for Iran. Neorealists, by definition, are only concerned with issues that effect the security

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[610] *BBC News On-line*, "Progress for Iranian Pilgrims," (8 July 1998) on the internet at http://www.bbc.com [Accessed 23 July 2000].

[611] Sheehan, Internet.

[612] Hadar, Leon T. "The 'Green Peril': Creating the Islamic Fundamentalist Threat," Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute (27 August 1992) on the internet at http://www.cato.org [Accessed 12 October 1999].

of a nation[613]: "The survival motive is taken as the ground of action where the security of the state is not assured, rather than as a realistic description of the impulse that lies behind every act of state."[614] Even under the more conservative tutelage of the Ayatollah Khomeini himself, Iran behaved as neorealists predicted: allying with secular Syria to balance against Israel and dealing with his ideological enemies—the US, Israel, and the Soviet Union—to counter Iraqi aggression in the Iran-Iraq War. This behavior was reinforced again this decade with Iran's support of Christian Armenians against Muslim Azeri Islamists, and its lowering of rhetoric and support for Islamists in Lebanon.

Turmoil, conflict, and the threat of aggression almost completely surround Iran: War and civil war in Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, military coups in Pakistan, sedition groups in Iraq attacking and maiming Iranian leaders, angry rhetoric from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE; most disturbing of all to Tehran, the continual reminder that Iran is not the master of the Persian Gulf with the forward deployed forces of the United States ever in view. In this environment, Iran has continually demonstrated its propensity as a state that follows the course of neorealist-realpolitik and that ideology makes little difference when national security is at stake. This inner-face of Iranian foreign policy imperatives—neorealist and pragmatic—is the one which US decision makers and analysts must keep in their fore-thoughts when dealing with the country, avoiding the trappings of media rhetoric or the journalistic hue-and-cry of the monolithic Iranian terror network[615] which threatens the West. It is neorealism, and the need for a weaken state to balance power in the region which more accurately explains state behavior in vital issues of foreign policy and national security for Iran.

A sage statesman once said that *states have no permanent friends or foes, just national interest.* The obvious conclusion that where there is an interest, there is the possibility of conflict must be ever kept in ones mind. By balancing the interest of one

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[613] Guzzini, Stefano. Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy (New York: Routledge, 1998), 32.

[614] Waltz, 92.

[615] Hadar, (1992), Internet.

power against another, a smaller state can not only survive but also thrive if the conditions are suitable.[616] In the case of Iranian national security policy and relations with Israel, history has shown that the impact of revolutionary Islamic ideology on foreign policy pales in comparison to the appreciation afforded neorealist-*realpolitik*. Furthermore, in closing, as long as Iranian perception continues to view as threatening US regional intentions and the balance of power in the Middle East, we can expect Tehran's "pragmatic" policy choices to appear conflicting and paradoxical to many Western observers.

[616] Sadri, 1999.

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